



CHICKEN KARMA

WEIRD TALES OF NATURE
RED IN TOOTH AND CLAW

SOMETIMES THEY COME BACK WHEN POLTERGEISTS RETURN

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READING BETWEEN THE LINES VOYNICH MANUSCRIPT DECODED?

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LANDSCAPE OF BRITISH
CINEMA AND TELEVISION

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PARANORMAL
PROWLER

BLOOD ON THE FIELDS

WITCHCRAFT
AND MURDER
IN AN ENGLISH
VILLAGE

FT381
JULY 2019
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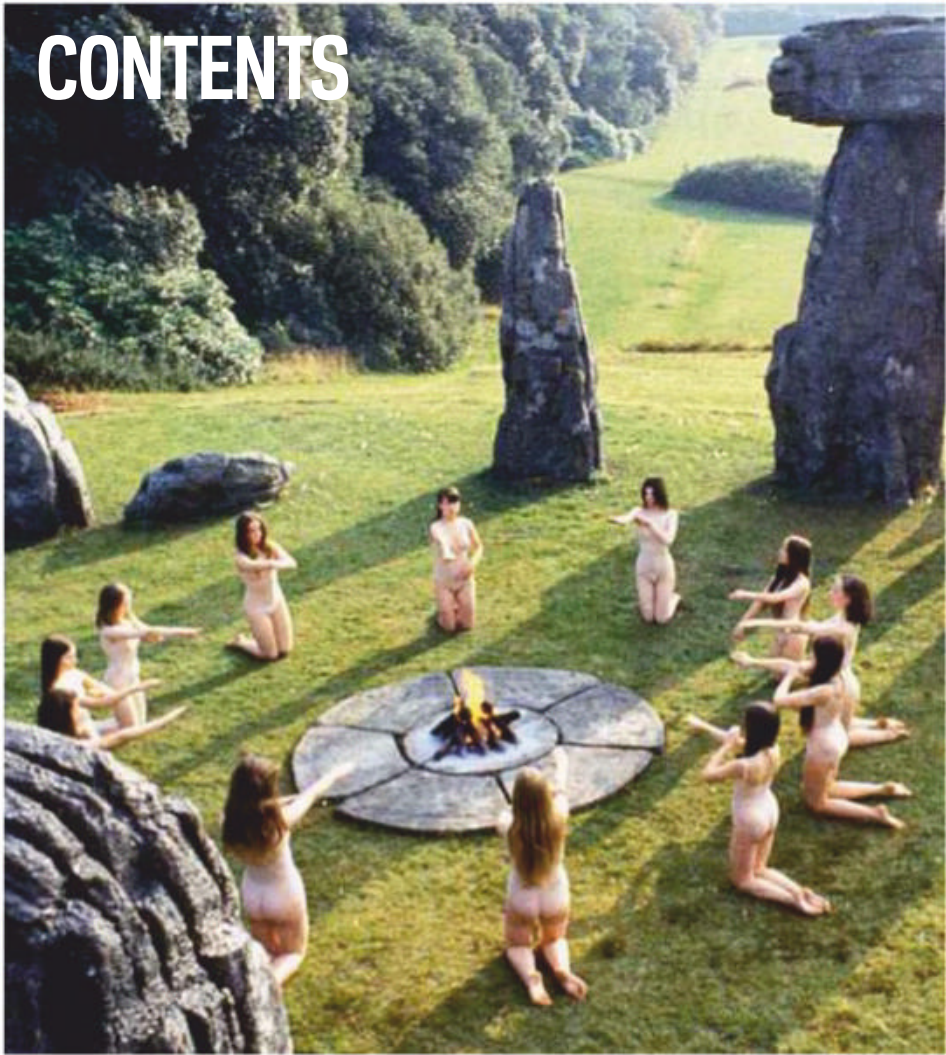
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FORTEAN TIMES 381

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Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

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EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

HAUNTED LANDSCAPES

FIELDS IN ENGLAND

We've touched a number of times in recent years on the hauntological imagination as it manifests in British culture – from the eerie power through which the artefacts of 1970s British television created what Bob Fischer termed “the Haunted Generation” (FT354:30-37 and p63 this issue), to the building of virtual folkloric worlds and invented English counties via social media (FT354:38-39) or the reliving of an imagined English Armageddon through dark tourism (FT378:30-36). One key aspect of this wider pop cultural phenomenon is the continued rise of the notion of ‘Folk Horror’, a term that’s not always easy to define but includes an emphasis on lore and landscape as sources of both disturbance and a strange sort of comfort. We’re pleased to welcome cultural historian Gail-Nina Anderson back to the pages of FT as she tries

to untangle the roots and ramifications of the Folk Horror Revival (p36), exploring how it owes its existence not only to a small body of works from 1970s film and television but also to their rediscovery and realignment in an alternative cinematic tradition. The emphasis, then, is as much on the ‘revival’ bit as the folkloric one – inevitably, perhaps, as our society moves further away from the land, from nature, and from the traditions that once helped us make sense of them. This revival is itself arguably at a further remove; we are not talking about the ‘invented traditions’ of Wicca or Neo-Paganism – creative, practice-based fabrications of continuity with a vanished past – more a yearning for a long-lost ‘structure of feeling’ engendered by early encounters with texts that already acknowledged such a past as another, unknowable country. If the Folk Horror Revival is an attempt at re-enchantment, then, it’s arguably one predicated solely on memories of, and nostalgia for, a very specific time and place.

Meanwhile, crime queen Cathi Unsworth revisits a bit of real life rural gothic in a fascinating account of the gruesome

murder of agricultural worker Charles Walton (p44). Death by pitchfork, rumours of witchcraft, tight-lipped villagers, and a still unsolved crime: sounds like the basis for a great Folk Horror movie to us.

EDFORT AND OTHERS

We also celebrate the wider fortean community this issue, as Rob Gandy reports on the continuing success of the annual Weird Weekend North (p22), bringing the strangeness for its fourth year running, and Gordon Rutter relates the history of the Edinburgh Fortean Society, a venerable institution (and moveable feast) that has been pub-hopping around the city for an impressive 20 years (p56). Gordon reckons EdFort is now the oldest extant fortean group in the country – drop us a line if you know otherwise. Meanwhile, down south, the London Fortean Society continues to

serve up a tasty menu of meetings for weird-watchers in the capital, thanks to the indefatigable efforts of Scott Wood and David Barrett. Despite the much-lamented absence of UnConvention from the schedules, there’s no shortage of quality high strangeness to be had if you know where to look.

ERRATA

FT377:31: A number of readers pointed out a mistake causing confusion about the date of the (possible) death of the Beast of Gévaudan: “The Beast was first said to have been killed in 1865, but in the end its reign only ended in 1767 when it was reportedly shot.” 1865 should have read 1765.

FT378:32: Another temporal typo was noted by Paul Whyte, who emailed to say: “I fail to see how an event from 1900 (paragraph 9) is ‘more modern’ than a report from 1919 (paragraph 5).” Hmm. We’re scratching our heads over that one too.

a CHILL-FILLED Festival of HORROR!



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TO HOME



T-SHIRT



MUG



TEA TOWEL

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

VOYNICH RIDDLE SOLVED... AGAIN?

Has the world's most mysterious manuscript finally been decoded? The experts are unconvinced...

There are certain mysteries and puzzles that are forever being 'solved'. Every few months, someone locates Atlantis or identifies Jack the Ripper, or spots Noah's Ark on a Turkish mountain. On 16 May 2019, dramatic headlines appeared in British dailies such as this one in the *Daily Telegraph*: "Medieval text too tough for Turing is cracked at last". Dr Gerald Cheshire, a research associate from the University of Bristol, claims to have solved the mystery of the celebrated Voynich Manuscript (VM), which has flummoxed linguists and cryptographers (including Bletchley Park hero Alan Turing and the FBI) ever since it was acquired by Polish book dealer Wilfrid M Voynich in 1912. The 235-page vellum codex has been carbon-dated to the 15th century.

Cheshire claims to have solved the riddle in a mere fortnight in May 2017. In his peer-reviewed paper, 'The Language and Writing System of MS408 (Voynich) Explained', published in the journal *Romance Studies*, Cheshire describes how, using lateral thinking and ingenuity, he 'deciphered' the manuscript and revealed the only known example of proto-Romance language, ancestral to today's Romance languages, including Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, Romanian, Catalan and Galician.

Voynich acquired the manuscript the same year Castello Aragonese changed hands, suggesting to Cheshire it might have been part of a house clearance. Castello Aragonese is on Ischia, a volcanic island in the Gulf of Naples. It was the



seat of Maria of Castile, Queen of Aragon, hence Cheshire claims the VM was compiled by Dominican nuns as a source of reference for the Queen – and is the only known example of the language of the common people of Ischia. Awkwardly, however, the Prague alchemist George Baresch, writing to Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher in 1639, mentioned that he had found the manuscript in his own library; and Voynich discovered it in the archives of the Villa Mondragone near Rome.

Judging from the imagery, many scholars consider the work to be a compendium of herbal remedies, therapeutic bathing and astrology. Danish botanist Theodore Holm tentatively identified 16 plant species. Others have found in it the last rites of the Cathars or a war epic in vowel-less Ukrainian (see "Maze of Madness" by Mike Jay, Jan 2000, **FT130:42-46**; also "Voynich Under the Microscope" by Barbara Barrett, Apr 2010, **FT260:58-59** and "Manuscripts of Mystery" by Ian Simmons, Oct 2016, **FT345:38-43**). Or the text was written in Old Turkish, in a

poetic style; or in Old Cornish, or in the Aztec language of Nahuatl, or in Manchu. Ultimately, a consensus emerged: the VM was either impossible to solve or else written in gibberish, as an elaborate practical joke.

"It uses an extinct language," Cheshire asserts. "Its alphabet is a combination of unfamiliar and more familiar symbols. It includes no dedicated punctuation marks... All of the letters are in lower case and there are no double consonants... It also includes some words and abbreviations in Latin." A bath time scene, showing two women bathing five children (shown above), describes a range of emotions: *tozotr* (buzzing, too noisy); *orla la* (on the edge, losing patience); *tolora* (silly, foolish); *noror* (cloudy; dull, sad); *or aus* (golden bird; well behaved); and *oleios* (oiled, slippery). Variations of these survive in modern Catalan (*tozos*, *or aus*); Portuguese (*orla*, *tolos*, *oleio*); and Romanian (*noros*). The words *orla la* may be the root of the French phrase *ooh là là*, which has a very similar sentiment.

Mediaeval experts are extremely sceptical. "Sorry folks, 'proto-Romance language' is not a thing," tweeted Dr Lisa Fagin Davis, executive director of the Medieval Academy of America. "This is just more aspirational, circular, self-fulfilling nonsense." Dr Kate Wiles, a mediaevalist, linguist and senior editor at *History Today*, said a new theory on the VM's meaning happened "on a six-monthly basis at least... there have been at least two in the past year," adding: "[Cheshire's theory] takes liberties with how we understand languages to work. He is arguing for a language built of words drawn from lots of places and periods, but together they don't create something that is convincing as a workable language."

Following such comments, Bristol University deleted its website article on Cheshire and distanced itself from him, commenting: "The research was entirely the author's own work and is not affiliated with the University of Bristol, the school of arts nor the Centre for Mediaeval Studies". Cheshire, however, was bullish, saying: "There is no need to persuade anyone, as the solution will be used to study the manuscript by linguists and historians in due course." *dailymail.co.uk*, 15 May; *D.Telegraph*, *theguardian.com*, 16+17+18 May; *Times*, 18 May 2019.

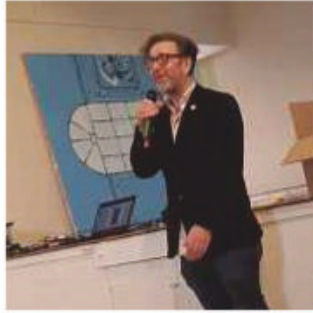
For the reaction of experts, see: <https://voynichportal.com/tag/gerard-cheshire-voynich-theory/> and <https://ciphermysteries.com/2017/11/10/gerard-cheshire-vulgar-latin-siren-call-polyglot>.



BUDDHA OF OZ

Ming era statue found on beach in Australia

PAGE 16



WEEKEND OF WEIRDNESS

Weird Weekend returns to Warrington

PAGE 22



JAWS OF TERROR

Piranhas turn up in Yorkshire fishing lake

PAGE 24

THE CONSPIRASPHERE

As a B-list actor joins the martyrs of the Conspirasphere, **NOEL ROONEY** notes that celebrity deaths have also become an element of some strange new theme park attractions...

THE DEATH OF ISAAC KAPPY

"I have told people in the Trump administration that I am willing to admit to my many crimes in a public setting, and committed to execution, in a public setting. A nation cannot suffer its traitors, and I am no exception." The last public utterance of Isaac Kappy, actor, musician, and latterly alt-right hero, was as bizarre as it was poignant. The following day, Kappy threw himself off a bridge above a busy highway (apparently fighting off a couple of passers-by who tried to stop him), was hit by a car when he landed, and declared dead at the scene. His 'execution' was very public indeed.

The untimely death of a B-list celebrity earned only passing interest in the mainstream media; brief stories appeared recounting his suicide, his so-so career (minor parts in *Thor*, *Breaking Bad*, and *Terminator: Salvation*) and a recent – allegedly violent – incident involving Paris Jackson (daughter of the late pop icon); one or two sources alluded to allegations made by the late actor about paedophilia in Hollywood. But in the Conspirasphere, the story was *huge*. Isaac Kappy has gone from small-time celeb to alt-right martyr; and his suicide has been widely declared a murder. The QAnon community in particular has blogged, vlogged, tweeted and posted a tsunami of performative grief, stoic patriotism and grim determination of the 'come and get me, punks' variety.

For some years, Kappy had been claiming that Hollywood was rife with paedophilia. He had 'outed' a number of big names, including Steven Spielberg and, most recently, Tom Hanks. His death is seen by many in the Conspirasphere as Deep State wet work on behalf of the vested Illuminati interests in the movie industry, to warn other truthers off the subject of satanic, homicidal child abuse among the elite. Now he takes his place in the conspiracists' book of martyrs, a hotchpotch tribute to the victims of more or less suspicious deaths since the

1970s; and further confirmation for the alt-right that they are engaged in a war, a jihad for the original soul of America.

And yet: those last posts speak of a disturbed individual, a man wracked by guilt and ashamed of his actions, and perhaps on the point of recanting his accusations. The real tragedy of Isaac Kappy's life and death may never be known, subsumed as it is into the mythical hagiography that casts its very slanted light on fatal events from Ruby Ridge to the Oklahoma bombings.

Celebrity death can, of course, be memorialised in a number of ways. Take the new attraction that allows you to experience a 3D reconstruction of the death of Princess Diana and then vote on whether you think it was a terrible accident, a paparazzi-induced catastrophe, or murder by reptilian royals. The theme park, in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, celebrates the sterling work of the *National Enquirer* (who doesn't?), and the attraction's creator, Robin Turner, affirms that "it's definitely not in poor taste". That, Robin, is very much a matter of opinion.

And that's not the only attraction based on alternative worldviews to make the press recently. Blackpool's visitors will, it seems, soon enjoy a series of interactive exhibitions based on what the PR refers to as "Erich von Däniken's *Chariots of the Gods*, a series of novels written in the 1960s and 1970s" (I'd love to know what Mr von D makes of that interpretation of his life's work). In any case, once the veracity of von Däniken's 'novels' has been established, the UK will have its very own version of the Mystery Park (von Däniken's own ancient alien playground in Switzerland; see **FT169:30-35**), and all will be done, no doubt, "in the best possible taste". www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/isaac-kappy-death-cause-age-thor-terminator-salvation-paris-jackson-a8914356.html; www.devonlive.com/news/uk-world-news/theme-park-ride-based-princess-2903052; www.blackpool.gov.uk.

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

ALASKA SUMMIT FACING 66 TONS OF FROZEN FECES

USA Today, 1 April 2019.

Mermaids banned from Plymouth's swimming pools

Plymouth Herald, 8 May 2019.

'NUN WITH DUFFEL BAG' DROPS 'SEVERED GOAT HEAD' ON PAVEMENT OUTSIDE CHELTENHAM PUB

gloucestershirelive.co.uk, 21 Jan 2019.

Sausage museum 'not moving to Nazi camp'

Times, 4 Feb 2019.

FOX SAYS CHLORINATED US CHICKEN SAFE TO EAT

D.Telegraph, 4 Mar 2019.

What squirrels can teach us about leaving a legacy

Toronto Star, 7 Mar 2019.

CASTLES IN THE AIR

This strange scene near the village of Mudurnu, about halfway between Istanbul and Ankara in northern Turkey, shows several hundred tightly-packed, identical mini-castles in an abandoned luxury housing development. Burj al Babas, as the project is known, was unpopular with locals, who objected to the developers abandoning traditional Turkish architecture in a bid to win custom from wealthy buyers from the Gulf states. Only a handful of the 'chateaux' have been sold and the construction company, Sarot Property Group, has gone bust, leaving this eerie ghost town of Disney-like castles standing empty. *Guardian*, 28 Jan 2019. PHOTO: ADEM ALTAN / AFP / GETTY IMAGES





SIDELINES...

COTTINGLEY SALE

A set of Cottingley fairy photographs and a folding quarter plate camera, belonging to Catherine Lynch, daughter of Frances Griffiths, fetched more than £50,000 at Dominic Winter Auctioneers in Cirencester, Gloucestershire, on 11 April. The images were staged by Griffiths (nine) and her cousin Elsie Wright (16) in a West Yorkshire garden in 1917 [FT43:48-53, 356:30-35]. *D.Express*, 1 April; *Sun*, 13 April 2019.

COW'S REVENGE

A slaughterhouse worker in Aalen, southern Germany, suffered serious injuries when kicked in the face by a dead cow due to a nerve impulse. The cow had been hung from a meat hook for further processing. The 41-year-old worker was hospitalised. [AP] 22 Feb 2019.

QUAKE COMMEMORATED

A plaque to commemorate Britain's most destructive earthquake was unveiled at 9.18am on 22 April. The epicentre of the 4.6R tremor, which struck on this day in 1884, was Wivenhoe, near Colchester, but the quake caused destruction across northern Essex with about 1,250 buildings flattened or damaged. It was the sixth quake to hit Colchester since 1048. *D.Telegraph*, 22 April 2019.

IT WAS MICE

Over half a ton of cannabis was found to be missing from a police warehouse in the Argentinean town of Pilar. Out of the 6,000kg that had been stored there two years earlier, only 5,460kg was left – meaning 540kg (1,190lb) was missing. Eight policemen claimed that mice had eaten it, but there was no forensic evidence of mice, and the cops were all fired. *themindunleashed.com*, 15 May 2018.



MARTIN ROSS

YETI TRACKS? | Indian Army team find footprints of "mythical beast"; brown bear tracks, say the sceptics



ABOVE: One of the photos tweeted by the Indian Army Mountaineering Expedition Team. BELOW: The Army's claims were met with scepticism on social media.

On 9 April, mountaineers from the Indian army on an expedition in Nepal found mysterious large footprints in the snow, measuring a gigantic 32x15in (81x38cm), at an altitude of 17,000ft (5,000m), close to a camp near Mount Makalu. "For the first time, an #IndianArmy Mountaineering Expedition Team has sited [sic] Mysterious Footprints of mythical beast 'Yeti'“ it said in a tweet on 29 April, not explaining how a "mythical beast" could leave footprints. A peculiar feature of the tracks is that they are in a completely straight line (reminiscent of the celebrated 'Devil's footprints' in Devon in 1855; see FT59:64, 173:75, 186:76, 200:29).

"This is probably a footprint of a brown bear," said Sathyakumar Sambandam, professor at the Wildlife Institute of India. "The footmarks get enlarged due to strong sun and winds in the heights, and the overlapping

of hind and front legs gives an impression of single giant mark."

Located on the border between Nepal and China, Makalu is among the highest mountains in the world and stands near the Makalu-Barun valley, a remote wilderness where Eric Shipton found his famous yeti footprints in 1951 (possibly faked: see FT54:18-20. Photos of these prints were sold in 2007, FT230:11).

Tales of a wild hairy beast roaming the Himalayas have captured the imagination of climbers in Nepal since the 1920s, prompting many, including Sir Edmund Hillary, to go looking for the creature. Poet Laureate Cecil Day-Lewis popularised the yeti with his novel *The Case of the Abominable Snowman*, published pseudonymously in 1941. In 2008, Japanese climbers returning from a mountain in western Nepal announced they had seen footprints, which they thought belonged to the yeti. For possible yeti prints in Bhutan, see FT339:12.

In 2013, Oxford University genetics professor Bryan Sykes conducted tests on hair samples left behind in footprints. He concluded the most likely explanation was that the yeti was a rare hybrid of the polar bear and brown bear, which would explain its unusual height and paw size. However, the existence of mountain manimals remains an open question. [R] *BBC News*, 30 April; *D.Mail*, 1 May 2019. For more on the yeti/bear controversy, see FT179:12, 240:28, 320:21, 322:17, 324:21, 326:21, 362:23.

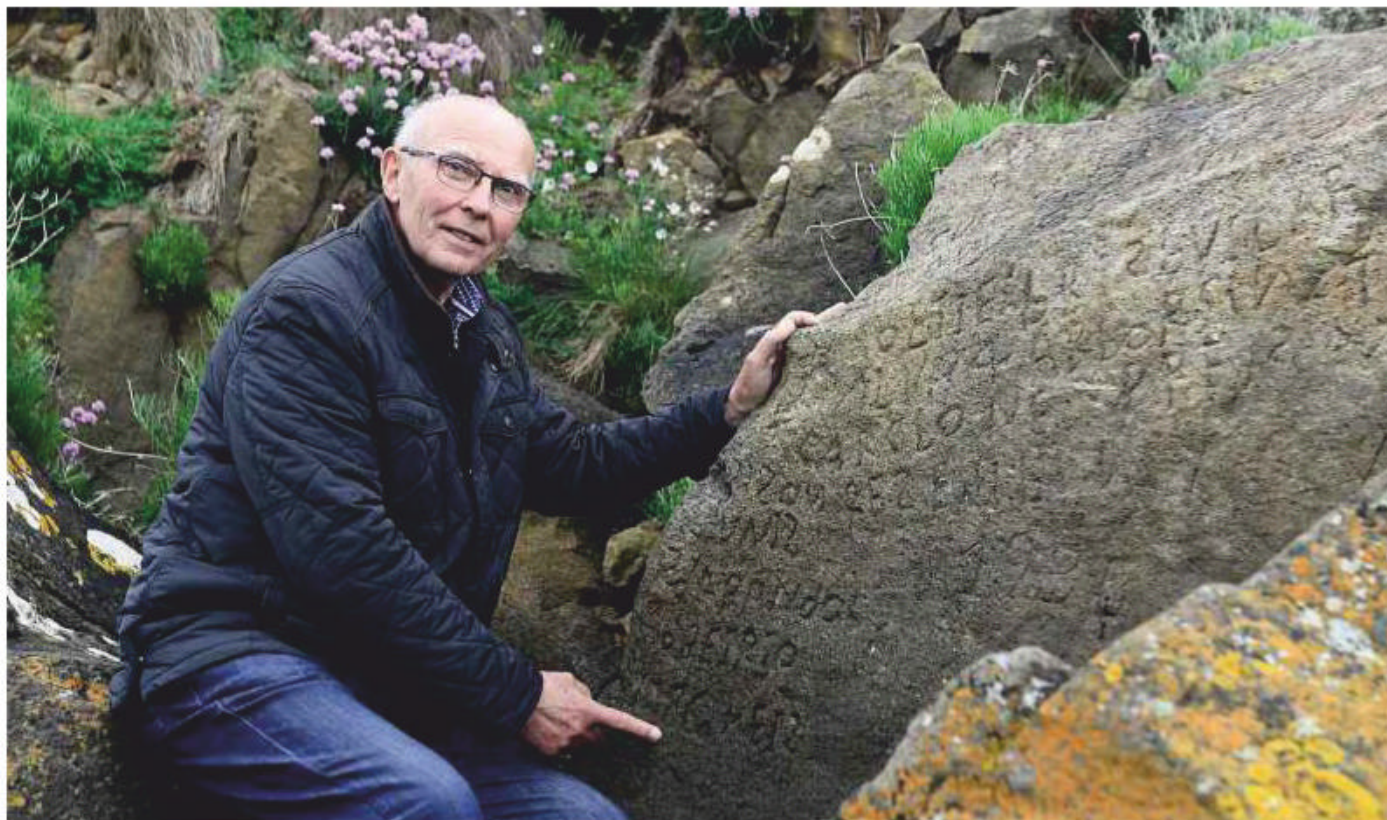
Makalu stands near the valley where Eric Shipton found his yeti footprints in 1915



PHOTOS: ADG PI - INDIAN ARMY



FRENCH ROCK RIDDLE | Village seeks help in deciphering inscription



ABOVE: Local councillor Michel Paugam points to indecipherable words carved into a rock in the Brittany village of Plougastel-Daoulas. **BELOW:** Theories abound, but no one has managed to decipher the mysterious 230-year-old inscription.

A village in Brittany is offering a 2,000 euro (£1,726) prize for help in deciphering a 230-year-old inscription found on a rock. No one has yet made out the meaning of the 20 lines of writing, first brought to the village council's attention in 1979.

The metre-high slab is in a cove accessible only at low tide near the village of Plougastel-Daoulas. Among the normal Roman letters some are reversed or upside-down. There are also some Scandinavian-style Ø letters. Two dates are visible – 1786 and 1787, shortly before the French Revolution. There is also the image of a ship with sails and rudder, and a sacred heart (a heart surmounted by a cross). Some think the writing may be in old Breton, Basque, or Scottish Gaelic. Or is it the phonetical transcription of a semi-literate engraver misspelling another language? In one section the letters read: “ROC AR B ... DRE AR GRIO SE EVELOH AR VIRIONES BAOAVEL”. Another reads: “OBBIE: BRISBVILAR ... FROIK ... AL”. One theory is that the inscription is linked to the building of naval defences near this point. A fort and gun emplacements – whose remains can still be seen – were erected here in the 1780s to protect the



Bay of Brest.

The public appeal for help in decipherment is called “The Champollion Mystery at Plougastel-Daoulas” – honouring Jean-François Champollion, who deciphered the Rosetta Stone's hieroglyphics. Linguistic and archaeological enthusiasts who registered at the mayor's administration were sent

photographs of the inscription. By 21 May, more than 2,000 replies had been received. Some suggest the words refer to a love story, a shipwreck – or a sleepy Georgian greengrocer. When entries close in November, a panel will choose the most plausible interpretation. *BBC News*, 10 May; *Times*, 21 May 2019.

SIDELINES...

HOPING FOR A HANDOUT

A Slovenian woman who cut off her hand with a circular saw faced up to eight years in jail. The 21-year-old had recently taken out injury insurance and stood to gain £346,000 in compensation, with another £2,600 a month. Relatives took her to hospital in Ljubljana, claiming she had been cutting branches. They left the hand behind to ensure the disability was permanent – but it was recovered and reattached. *BBC News*, 11 Mar; *D.Mail*, 13 Mar 2019.

AFFECTIONATE ALLIGATOR

A Pennsylvania man says his pet alligator helps him cope with depression. Wally, the 5ft (1.5m) reptile, was been officially registered as an emotional support animal. “He likes to give hugs”, said 65-year-old Joie Henney. “He's just like a dog. He wants to be loved and petted”. *Philly.com*, 24 Jan 2019.

HIGH 'N' MASHED

Researchers monitoring Thames water have detected record levels of cocaine (especially near the Houses of Parliament) having entered the river via users' urine passing through the sewage system. Now there are concerns that London's freshwater eels are becoming hyperactive as they accidentally ingest traces of the drug. *Sun*, 21 Jan 2019.

SUITS YOU SIR

Sulphur Police Department in Louisiana received calls about a person dressed as a gorilla looking into houses. It was Jeremie Moran. As officers approached, he ran into a house and was discovered hiding under a mattress. He was jailed on charges including resisting an officer, unauthorised entry, Methedrine possession and wearing a mask. *[AP]* 22 Feb 2019.

MOUSE PROUD

Retired electrician Stephen Mckears, 72, was puzzled to find clips, screws and bolts appearing in an old ice cream tub in his shed in Severn Beach, Gloucestershire, containing peanuts to feed birds. He emptied out the bits and bobs on his work surface, but the mess was always put back by morning. He set up a camera, which captured a mouse busily tidying up from midnight to 2.30am. *D.Mail etc*, 19 Mar 2019.



SIDELINES...

WHAT A DRAG

A fortunate fisherman fell overboard and was dragged five miles (8km) by his own boat as it returned to port with its autopilot on. Clinging onto the vessel's hydraulic pipes, Nathan Rogers, 40, described as a "very experienced fisherman", was eventually rescued by Penzance lifeguards. *D.Telegraph, 29 Dec 2018.*

WHIRLWIND CHANGE

Natural selection usually takes place over generations; but in an unusually speedy example of evolutionary change, *Anolis scriptus* lizards on the Turks and Caicos Islands have adapted in one year. Two devastating hurricanes in a single year saw many of the lizards blown to their deaths, but the survivors have abnormally long front legs and large toepads, which, scientists believe, allowed them to literally cling on for dear life. *D.Telegraph, 26 July 2018.*

FINGER PUNISHED

A distraught Indian man chopped off his left index finger after realising he had voted for the wrong political party. Pawan Kumar, 25, a Dalit, meant to vote for the regional Bahujan Samaj Party but, confused by the many symbols on the voting machine, wrongly chose the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). He cast his vote in Bulandshahr in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. The sacrificed digit had been marked with indelible ink to prevent repeat voting. *BBC News, 19 April; Guardian, 20 April 2019.*

LAKE ON MARS?

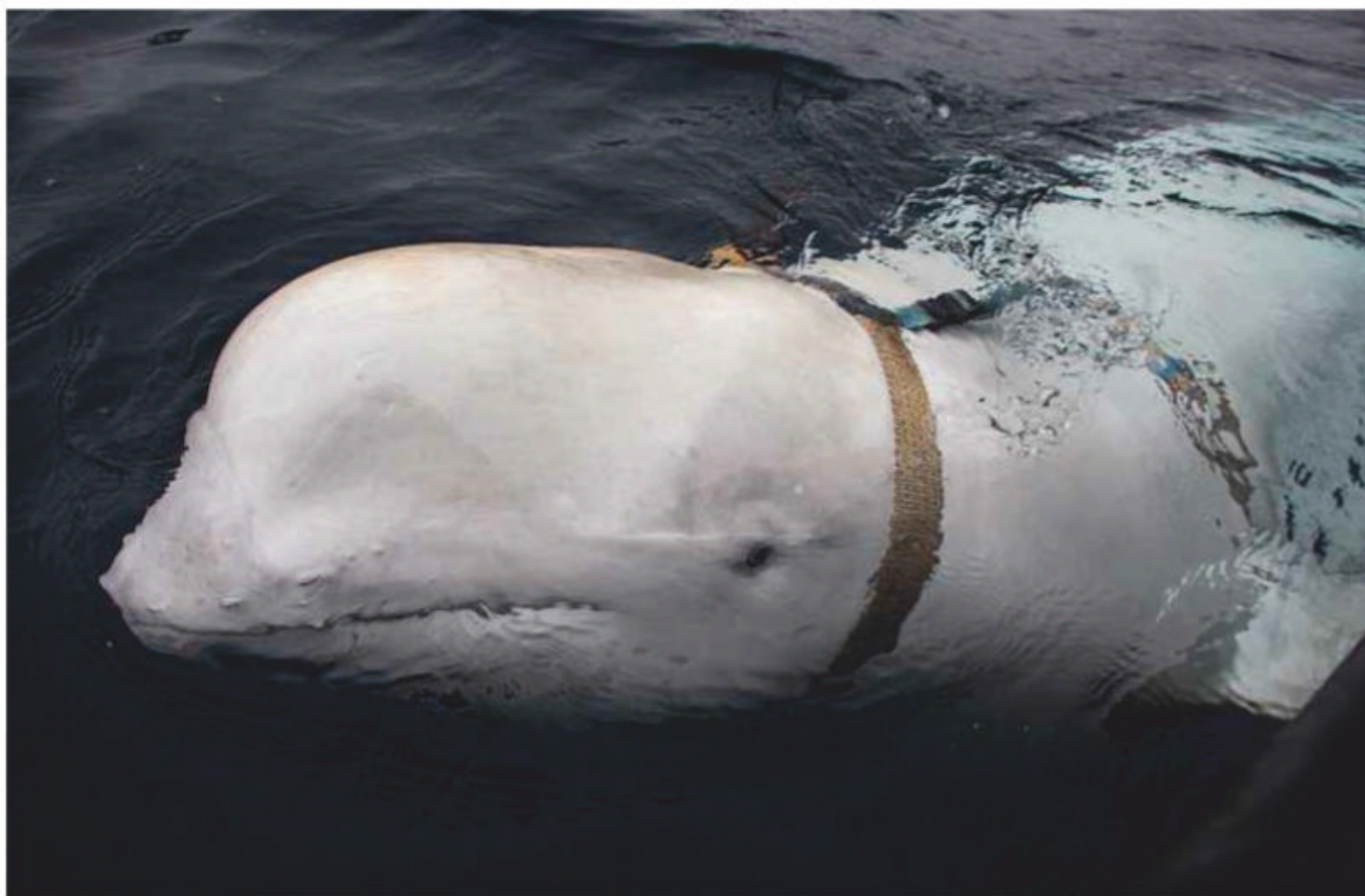
A 12-mile (20km) long lake of water has been detected one mile (1.6km) below Mars's southern polar ice cap by the European Space Agency's Mars Express spacecraft, raising hopes that life may yet be detected below the planet's surface. A similar underground body of water, Lake Vostok, found 2.4 miles (4km) beneath Antarctica, contains over 3,500 species. *D.Telegraph, 26 July 2018.*



MARTIN ROSS

WHALE MYSTERY

Is Norway's beluga a Russian spy or a rogue therapy whale?



BELOW: The mystery whale arrived wearing a harness and camera holder. BELOW: Hvaldimir retrieves a lost cell phone.

On 25 April, a tame beluga whale wearing a harness repeatedly approached Norwegian fishing boats off Ingoya, an Arctic island about 415km (258 miles) from Murmansk, where Russia's Northern Fleet is based. Belugas are native to Arctic waters. Audun Rikardsen, professor at the department of Arctic and marine biology at the Arctic University of Norway, said the harness had a GoPro camera holder (but no camera), with "Equipment St Petersburg" written on the harness buckle. "A Russian colleague said they don't do such experiments, but she knows the Navy has caught belugas for some years and trained them – most likely it's related to that," said Prof Rikardsen. "Belugas, like dolphins and killer whales, are quite intelligent – they are Arctic animals and quite social, they can be trained like a dog". The harness, which was attached really tightly round its head in front of its pectoral fins, was difficult to remove. "The beluga had come to the boats repeatedly for two or three days, looking for food, with its mouth open," said Prof Rikardsen. "It's

"Equipment St Petersburg" was written on the buckle harness



a challenge now if the whale will adjust to natural food. Also it needs to find a group – if not, it will probably still come up to a boat."

A Russian reserve colonel, who has written previously about the military use of marine mammals, shrugged off Norway's concern, but he didn't deny that it could have escaped from the Russian Navy. Interviewed by Russian broadcaster Govorit

Moskva, Col Viktor Baranets said: "If we were using this animal for spying do you really think we'd attach a mobile phone number with the message 'please call this number'? We have military dolphins for combat roles, we don't cover that up. In Sevastopol [in Crimea] we have a centre for military dolphins, trained to solve various tasks, from analysing the seabed to protecting a stretch of water, killing foreign divers, attaching mines to the hulls of foreign ships." Dolphins' razor-sharp vision, stealth and good memory making them effective underwater tools for detecting weapons.

The dolphin facility in Crimea used to be under Ukrainian control, but was seized by the Russian Navy in 2014, when Russian forces took over the peninsula. Government public records show that the defence ministry purchased five bottle-nosed dolphins, aged between three and five, from Moscow's Utrish Dolphinarium in 2016 at a cost of £18,000. During their research the Murmansk sea biology research institute concluded dolphins and seals were much more suited to the



training and arctic climates than beluga whales. The whales were deemed too sensitive to the cold and did not have the same “high professionalism” of seals, which had a far better memory for oral commands.

During the Cold War, the US Navy set up a special programme for training dolphins and sea lions in California. The US Navy Marine Mammal Program, based in San Diego, uses bottlenose dolphins and California sea lions for locating mines and other dangerous objects on the ocean floor. The Navy website also says the animals are used to detect unauthorised personnel underwater who could potentially harm US ships. The US Navy deployed dolphins to the Gulf during the Iraq War in 2003 to help mine-clearance teams. In 2015, Hamas captured a dolphin off Gaza and accused Israel of equipping the animal with spying devices.

When no one publicly announced they had lost a “spy whale”, another angle on the story emerged when Morten Vikeby, a former Norwegian consul to the city of Murmansk, said the amiable beluga reminded him of a “therapy whale” he’d seen in 2008 at a diving centre in the Murmansk region. That whale, named Semyon, sometimes entertained tour groups of children with mental disabilities. “Maybe it wasn’t the same whale but it acted the same way,” he said. The likelihood that the Ingoya beluga is Semyon is a long shot. “For the last two and a

- Last February, South African dive tour operator and marine conservationist Rainer Schimpf, 51, was nearly swallowed by a whale after he was swept into its jaws during a sardine feeding frenzy. Snorkelling 29 miles (47km) off the coast of Port Elizabeth, he attempted to film a sardine run by plunging into the centre of a swirling bait ball – and was sucked headfirst into the mouth of a Bryde’s whale. Heinz Toperczer, who witnessed the dramatic scene from a nearby boat, immediately began snapping away, capturing everything but Schimpf’s legs vanishing inside the whale.

“There was no time for fear or any emotion,” said Schimpf. “I could feel the pressure on my hip. I knew that a whale had come and taken me and I instinctively held my breath, assuming that it would dive down again and spit me out somewhere in the depths of the Indian Ocean.” He’s lucky it didn’t – Bryde’s whales can dive for five to 15 minutes reaching depths of up to 1,000ft (300m). “It was pitch black inside,” he said. “As the whale turned sideways, it opened its mouth slightly to release me and I was washed out, together with what felt like tons of water, while the whale swallowed all the fish in its throat.” Schimpf surfaced, still clutching his underwater camera. The whole ordeal lasted a mere 1.8 seconds. After checking he had no injuries, he dived back into the sea in search of the bait ball. The Bible tells us that when Jonah was swallowed by a whale, it took three days and three nights before he was finally spat out, alive, on a beach. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 9 Mar 2019.*

half years, there haven’t been any whales here,” said Mikhail Safonov, the head of the Arctic Circle dive centre. He believed the last whale had been sold to the St Petersburg Oceanarium in 2016. He never saw any of them wear harnesses and they “never had tasks or exercises where they would exit the enclosure into the sea”.

The Ingoya beluga has become a local celebrity. Locals have christened him Hvaldimir, a portmanteau of the Norwegian word for whale, hval, and the Russian name Vladimir. A regular in the sea by the

harbour city of Hammerfest, he even retrieved Ina Mansika’s cell phone after she dropped it in the water. “I had forgotten to close my jacket pocket and my phone fell in the ocean,” she said. “We assumed it would be gone forever, until the whale dove back down and came back a few moments later with my phone in its mouth!”

Dmitry Glazov, a Russian scientist and deputy head of the beluga white whale programme, said that near Murmansk alone there were “three organisations, not necessarily military, some civilian, that train marine mammals, including belugas, for various tasks: retrieving objects, or finding divers who have had problems, like equipment malfunctions”. Glazov noted that there were reports of plans to use belugas to defend the waters off Sochi during the 2014 Olympics, but he said the presence of a harness alone would not confirm that Hvaldimir has any ties to the Russian military. “These kinds of buckles are sold all across Russia,” he said. *BBC News, theguardian.com, 29 April; D.Telegraph, Metro, 30 April; Sun, 8 May; travelandleisure.com, 9 May; Guardian online, 10 May 2019.*



ABOVE: Tuffy the porpoise receives training from the US Navy in this 1965 photo.

SIDELINES...

DOUBLE JUDGEMENT

2018 saw North Carolina afflicted with two biblical-style plagues. Spring’s unusually heavy rainfall gave tree frogs plenty of pools to lay their spawn. When hatched, they climb branches in search of bugs. “I’ve heard of people stepping outside and frogs falling on their shoulder, freaking them out”, said biologist Jeff Hall. And Hurricane Florence’s torrential rains in autumn are believed to have created perfect conditions for oversize mosquitoes, *Psorophora ciliata*. *wired.com, 3 Oct; mysteriousuniverse.com, 12 Oct 2018.*

SHOT HIMSELF IN THE FOOT

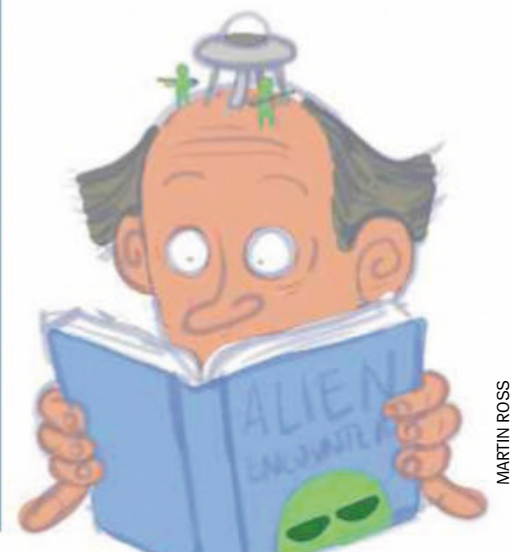
A 50-year-old wheelchair-bound man saw a cockroach across the room in his Detroit home and decided to kill it. He threw his shoe at the critter, forgetting his revolver was in it. The gun fell, went off and hit him in the foot. He was taken to hospital. *D.Mirror, 23 Mar 2019.*

ALDI FROGS

A live frog was found in a bag of salad from Aldi in Redruth, Cornwall, last July. We earlier noted another frog found in a bag of salad from Aldi in Bedminster, Bristol, last September [FT377:11]. An Aldi spokesman said this kind of incident was “incredibly rare”. Both frogs had been refrigerated, and both were released into the wild. *D.Mail, 3 July 2018.*

UNNOTICED INVASION

In her paper given at the ‘Decoding Alien Intelligence Workshop,’ NASA expert Silvano P Colombano suggested that extraterrestrial beings may already have visited Earth, but since they could be “extremely tiny super-intelligent” entities, it’s quite possible that we simply haven’t noticed them. *Yahoo News UK, 4 Dec 2018.*



MARTIN ROSS



SIDELINES...

NOTHING BETTER TO DO

Google employee Emma Haruka has broken the world record for the most accurate value of pi, coming up with 31,415,926,535,897 digits. She used 25 Google Cloud virtual machines. Getting the figure took 121 days and 170 terabytes of data. *Metro*, 15 Mar 2019.

PLAYING WITH FIRE

Last June, someone in Siuntio, Finland, tried to get rid of a snake from their garden by spraying it with petrol. Some spilt on a warm lawnmower, ignited, and set fire to their wooden house. In October, a man in California set his parents' home on fire while using a blowtorch to kill black widow spiders. *<i> 20 June; The News (Portsmouth), 26 Oct 2018.*

INHALING THE OUTBACK

A South Australian entrepreneur is planning to sell "outback air" to China. Joe Duchiera, 36, from Croydon Park, planned to launch Ozi Air in April. "Specialised machinery" tests the purity of the air, before it is put into a compressed air can. Consumers take in the air via a facemask on top of the can, which lasts for 140-160 breaths – or about nine to 10 minutes. Retail price: A\$23.99 (£12.90) – or A\$179.99 (£97) for a dozen. *Adelaide Advertiser*, 21 Mar 2019.

GOAT ADVENTURE

A pygmy goat called Belle went missing from her farm in Greenfield, Saddleworth, on 11 March. Three days later, she was discovered 25 miles (40km) away at a tram station in Sale, Greater Manchester, waiting behind the yellow line with other commuters. She was reunited with her brother, Jingle. *Metro*, 15 Mar 2019.

TRY DRINKING IT...

In an effort to improve her health, a woman in China almost died after injecting herself with a cocktail of more than 20 different fruit juices. Zeng, 51, from Chenzhou, Hunan province, gave herself an intravenous infusion by drip. Her skin began to itch, her temperature rose, and she suffered liver, kidney, heart and lung damage. She was put into intensive care on 22 February for five days. *BBC News*, 19 Mar; *<i> 20 Mar; Dublin Gazette, 28 Mar 2019.*

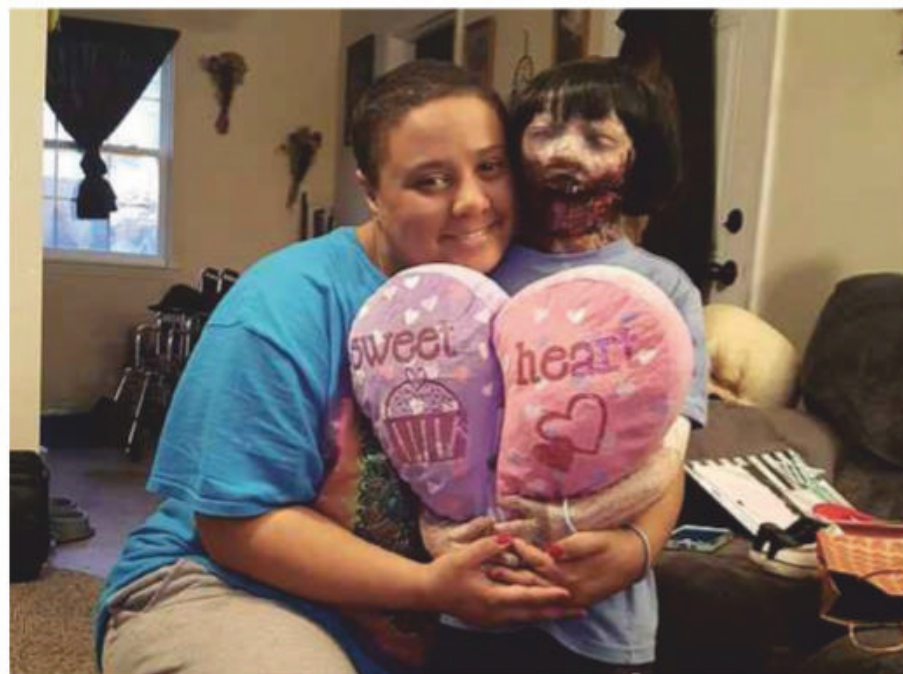
I MARRIED A ZOMBIE

Woman celebrates big day with the bloody "love of her life"



ABOVE: Felicity and Kelly tie the knot. BELOW: Felicity looks past Kelly's bloody face and missing lower jaw as they relax at home.

Felicity Kadlec Rossi, 21, has married a zombie doll after an "emotional and intimate" seven-year relationship and says they even consummated their marriage. The ceremony took place in Tiverton, Rhode Island, and cost \$500 (£388). It was attended by four of her family friends and eight of her other dolls, who "watched" her wed the "love of her life", who Felicity says is called Kelly Rossi and is aged 37. Images of the wedding show Felicity in a white wedding dress, lovingly embracing the toy, which was dressed in a tuxedo for the occasion, but deigned not to wash the blood, white makeup or black smudges off its face – or tidy up its teeth. After their wedding, Felicity said that Kelly was the groom because she "takes the male role in our relationship" and dressed her up in a suit because she is a tomboy. However, since sharing her love for the doll, she has received hate messages from people believing her wife is a dead child. She enlisted the help of her local police in Vinita, Oklahoma. During her visit to Vinita Police



station on 28 March, she had a photograph taken with Kelly and a policeman who held a sign stating: "Vinita police checked it out. It's just a doll." Felicity says she's been in a relationship with the doll since she was 16, after finding Kelly on a 'creepy doll' website at 13 and developing romantic feelings three years later. "Like myself, Kelly aged with me and I have only ever seen her as an adult – she has never been a child in my eyes," she said. "Kelly was created as a

Hallowe'en doll and wasn't created to have any likeness to a child – she's just a zombie... Ever since people have called me a paedophile I have had a hard time being affectionate with Kelly. Now that it has been confirmed, I want to be able to move on and enjoy our relationship and marriage... I married Kelly but only because I accept her for who she is. I look past her bloody face and I don't mind her not having a jaw." *Metro*, 10 April; *unilad.co.uk*,

FELICITY KADLEC / CATERS NEWS

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In the heat of the moment

DAVID HAMBLING asks if sudden heat bursts can burn crops and leave corn “cooked on the stalk”

A heat burst is an unusual but established phenomenon producing a sudden, dramatic increase in temperature. Meteorologists have a good idea what drives them, but questions remain about just how hot a heat burst can get, and whether claims that the effect can scorch plants and melt roads should be taken seriously. The daily pattern of temperature is usually fairly consistent. The Earth is warmed by the Sun, which is at its hottest at noon. Temperatures on the ground lag behind, so the middle of the afternoon is usually warmest. One of the surprising aspects of heat bursts is that they often arrive in the middle of the night.

Heat bursts invariably occur after hot summer days, when rising warm air produces enormous anvil-shaped clouds. These are the familiar cumulonimbus incus commonly associated with summer thunderstorms. Rather than a storm, though, these clouds may release a shower into the dry air below. If the temperature is high enough and the humidity low enough, the rain evaporates before it reaches the surface. This evaporation cools the air suddenly, causing it to sink, adding to the downward momentum from the rain. The mass of falling air heats up again as the pressure increases, but momentum carries it down until it reaches the ground and fans outwards. At ground level witnesses experience a blast of hot, dry air like a hairdryer. This can last for a few minutes.

Heat bursts resemble microburst storms, in which the downward-moving mass of air is accompanied by intense rain or hail. These are more common and better understood but do not produce the same extreme heating. Heat bursts are rare and unpredictable, making them difficult to study. Researchers have to rely on whatever measuring instruments happen to be present. These may be supplemented with radar data, which can confirm the precipitation and the pattern of wind flow. A 2011 study by the University of Oklahoma recorded 207 bursts in the state over a 15-year period. June was the most active month, with 30 per cent of the bursts, the majority occurring between 6pm and 2am.

There were some notable heat bursts in 2018. One occurred shortly after midnight on 24 June 2018 in the Texas town of Breckenridge. The temperature rose rapidly from 30°C to 37°C (86–98.6°F), making the town briefly the hottest place in the



LEFT: Heat bursts reportedly leave crops withered and burned in the fields.

Western hemisphere. Gusts of 47mph (76km/h) were recorded. In July 2018 Fort Morgan in Colorado experienced a heat burst in the early hours. This was accompanied by 60mph (96km/h) winds which uprooted trees and brought down power lines. Local residents reported a strong smell of smoke, believed to be from fires burning in the mountains some distance away being brought back to ground level by the powerful downdraft.

Perhaps the most famous case occurred in Kopperl, Texas, on 15 June 1960, in an event that became known – to the media at least – as ‘Satan’s storm’. Earlier in the evening, heat lightning was seen in the distance, and a dark mass of cloud rolled over the town around midnight. Then the heat burst hit and the town was hit by powerful winds, believed to be at least 75mph (120km/h). Again, trees were brought down and the tin roofs ripped off buildings.

Power lines around Kopperl were brought down and air conditioning failed, forcing people to wrap themselves and their children in wet sheets to cool off. Reports that some people thought it was the end of the world may be exaggerations. This was, though, at the height of the Cold War, and the end of the world may have seemed a likely prospect. Certainly, it is plausible that, as in other heat burst events, people rushed out of their houses thinking they were on fire because of the sudden increase in temperature, and it was so hot it was difficult to breathe.

A porch thermometer at Kopperl’s Bait and Tackle Shop is said to have recorded

60°C (140°F). This is higher than the accepted highest recorded temperature of 56.7°C (134°F) at El Aziza in Libya, the difference being that the Libyan temperature was measured at an official weather station, and there were no weather stations in Kopperl. According to one account, some alcohol thermometers in Kopperl were broken by the rapid change in temperature. The accuracy of the thermometer is not known, and few ordinary thermometers can register such high temperatures, but the report is generally considered plausible. The next morning farmers found that crops were withered, cotton fields were “burned to a crisp” and corn

had been “cooked on the stalk”. Entire fields of grass had been turned into “dry hay ready for baling”. Some claimed that house paint was blistered by the heat.

The combination of high temperature and low humidity would certainly wither growing crops, though claims of vegetation being charred or carbonised deserve a little more scepticism. Reading through different accounts of the event, later authors have tended to use their own wording rather than sticking to the original descriptions, and they invariably emphasise the scorching heat, so exaggeration can easily creep in.

At least one heat burst was reputedly hotter than Kopperl. In Abadan, Iran, in 1967 the shade temperature is claimed to have hit a credibility-stretching 86°C (187°F), melting asphalt and supposedly killing dozens of people. Abadan is undoubtedly hot, with an average daily maximum in July of 45°C (113°F), but one has to ask what kind of thermometer could have measured such a temperature. And while a heat burst may increase temperature by 10 degrees, the claimed event would require much greater heating. Without further evidence, the report remains decidedly anecdotal.

Heat bursts may be spreading. In June 2015, hot winds in the night caused panic among local residents in several locations in Kerala, India. Analysis of wilted leaves suggested a pattern consistent with heat bursts, previously unknown in the area. Heat bursts are now respectable members of the club of meteorological phenomena, but they may be capable of wild extremes which science has yet to appreciate fully.

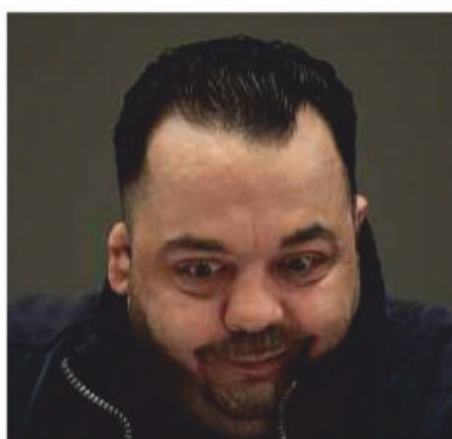
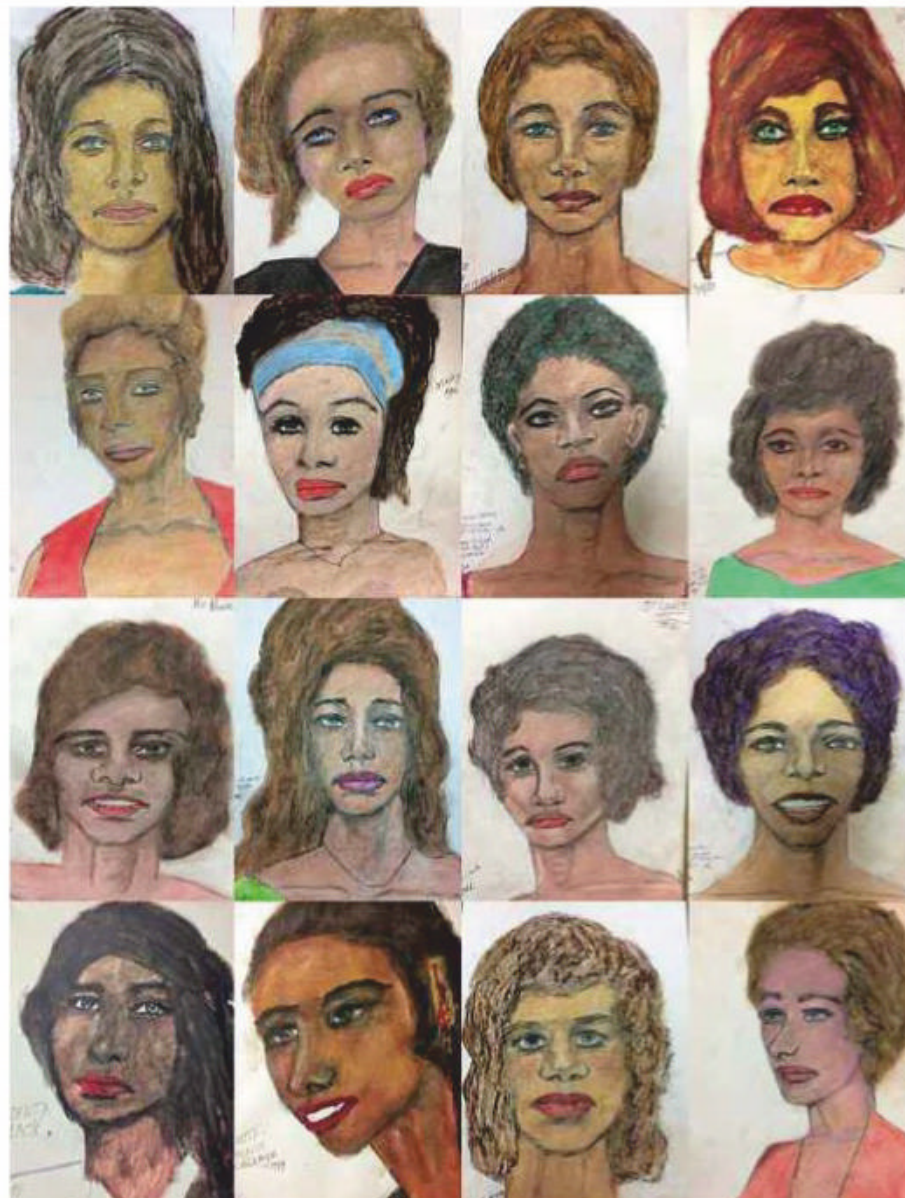


SERIAL KILLERS 'FESS UP | Last year saw a number of convicted serial killers confessing to hundreds more murders

Last year saw a cluster of serial killer confessions in various parts of the world. They included Niels Högel, a former nurse who, at his trial in October, admitted to having murdered 100 of his patients between 2000 and 2005. The 41-year-old German, already serving a life sentence for six previous murders, dispatched his victims with lethal doses of medication. He told the court how he deliberately induced heart failure in patients, because he enjoyed “being able to resuscitate them” – a skill with which he was not entirely successful.

- In Japan, another nurse, 31-year-old Ayumi Kuboki, was reported in July to having confessed to murdering at least 20 elderly patients. She told police how she would add disinfectant to a patient’s drips towards the end of her shift, so that they would die when she was no longer on duty. It was “a nuisance” having to explain to relatives the circumstances of someone dying during her shift, Kuboki said.

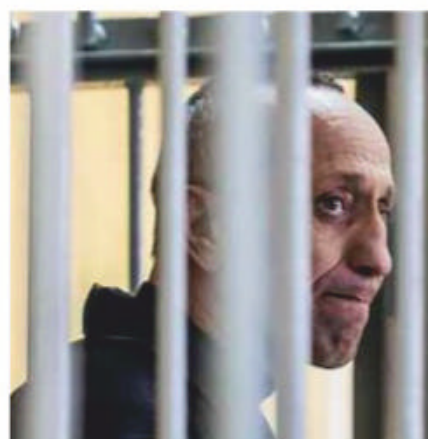
- Going one better than killer nurses, in December, an Irkutsk court found Russian policeman Mikhail Popkov guilty of having murdered 56 people, nearly all women, over a 15-year period. Like Högel, Popkov was already serving a life sentence, for the murders of 22 women. His *modus operandi* was to offer lone women a lift in his car late at night. Known to newspapers as “the werewolf” or the “Angarsk Maniac” (Angarsk being his Siberian home town), the 53-year-old Popkov claimed he only targeted “women who lead loose lifestyles”. Like Peter Sutcliffe, the Yorkshire Ripper, whose self-proclaimed motive was “to clean up the streets,” Popkov described himself as a “cleaner”. However, the state’s lead investigator regarded Popkov’s motivation as simply a hatred of women; his killing spree apparently having begun



Little says he has vivid memories of each victim’s appearance

after learning that his wife was having an affair.

- In September, an Indian tailor, Adesh Khamra, was arrested in Bhopal, Madhya



Pradesh, for murdering 33 lorry drivers during the past decade. Khamra admitted befriending truck drivers at roadside cafes, drugging their food, and then strangling them in secluded locations. Although he and his accomplices then sold his victims’ lorries, Khamra claimed to be motivated by a desire to free them from a life of hardship. “They lead hard lives,” he is reported as saying, “I am giving them *mukti* [release], freeing them from pain.” Seven other men have

LEFT: Samuel Little produced these portraits of his victims from memory. BOTTOM LEFT: Niels Högel at his trial on charges of mass murder. BOTTOM RIGHT: Caged serial killer Mikhail Popkov at a 2018 hearing.

also been arrested on suspicion of aiding and abetting Khamra’s crimes.

- A Mexican man, Juan Carlos Hernández, confessed to a court in 2018 to necrophilia and the murder of 20 women. Offering to sell them clothes, perfume or mobile phones, his wife Patricia lured the women to their home. After killing each victim, Hernández had sex with the body and used the flesh as pet food and plant fertiliser. The remaining bones were strewn around Hernández’s neighbourhood of Ecatepec. Hernández said he began his murder spree in 2012, telling police that he hated his mother for having dressed him in girl’s clothing as a boy, and making him watch whilst she had sex with men.

- Finally, in a Texas prison last year, another convicted killer, 78-year-old Samuel Little, admitted murdering 90 vulnerable women, mainly sex workers and drug addicts, in numerous US states from 1970 to 2012. As a former boxer, Little was able to stun his victims into unconsciousness with a powerful punch before strangling them. Many of his victims were believed to have died of drug overdoses or natural causes. Little, who was already serving life for three murders, says he has vivid memories of each victim’s appearance. Following FBI officials’ request, he drew portraits of many of the women, using chalk, pastels and watercolours. *D.Telegraph*, 11 July, 31 Oct, 30 Nov, 11 Dec; *Metro*, 13 Sept, 9+13+31 Oct, 11 Dec; *Times*, 13 Sept; *independent.co.uk*, 17 Sept; *BBC News*, 10 Dec 2018; *D.Telegraph*, 14 Feb 2019.

COURTESY FBI

DAVID HECKER / GETTY IMAGES

ANTON KLIMOV / AFP / GETTY IMAGES



PAUL SIEVEKING unearths evidence of early crop cultivation and spice trading, plus a Buddha in Oz

BUDDHA FOUND IN AUSTRALIA

A bronze Buddha believed to date back to the early Ming dynasty has been found on a remote beach in Western Australia's Gascoyne region, suggesting Chinese sailors made landfall in Australia over 500 years ago. Former Chinese president Hu Jintao claimed in a 2003 address in the Australian parliament that expeditionary Ming Dynasty Chinese fleets travelled to Australia in the early 15th century – 350 years before Captain Cook, and more than a century before Willem Janzoon and Dirk Hartog reached Western Australia, the latter hammering a pewter plate at Shark Bay. (English pirate William Dampier named Shark Bay after sailing there in 1699.)

Sydney University China expert Xiaohuan Zhao said the statue could date to the reign of either the Yongle emperor (1402-24) or the Xuande emperor (1425-35), but he thought it most likely came to Australia post-Ming dynasty. Two filmmakers, Shayne Thomson and Leon Deschamps, discovered it using metal detectors during filming for a documentary about French explorer Nicholas Baudin's voyage to Australia in 1800-1804. They were looking for objects left behind by the French when they came across the Buddha, which weighs 1kg (35oz) despite its small size. They described the find as possibly "evidence of the 1421 Chinese Ming Dynasty 'Treasure Fleets' exploration of Australia". A former curator at Melbourne's Chinese Australian History museum, Paul Macgregor, was sceptical, suggesting the statue could be a 19th century replica brought to Australia by Chinese pearlers. (It's not clear from the report whether the statue has been authenticated beyond doubt as early Ming.) *Times*, 9 Feb; *news.com.au*, 10 Feb 2019.

SRI LANKAN CONNECTION

The port town of Mantai in northwestern Sri Lanka, a nexus for the spice trade, flourished between 200 BC and AD 850. A recent study of ancient plant remains reveals traders from all corners of the world, including the Roman Empire, may have visited or even lived there. Eleanor Kingwell-Banham, an archaeobotanist at University College London, has found an abundance of locally grown rice grains, but also more exotic products: charred black pepper dating to AD 600-700 and a single clove from AD 900-1100, which must have made quite a journey: about 7,000km (4,350 miles) from its native home in the Maluku Islands of Indonesia.

The team also found remains that could link the port city to the ancient Mediterranean world – processed wheat grains dated to AD 100-200 and grape seeds dated to AD 650-



800. Neither crop can grow in Sri Lanka's wet, tropical climate, so they had to be imported, possibly from Arabia or the Roman world. The chemical isotopes absorbed by the plants should determine where they were grown; but no matter their precise origin, the coexistence of rice and wheat is evidence of Mantai's cosmopolitan cuisine. The discovery of wheat and grapes shifts the focus on goods transported from South Asia to the Roman world, to goods that went in the other direction. So were there Roman merchants living in Mantai, importing and cooking the foods of their homeland? "It's certainly a possibility," says historian Matthew Cobb. But no one has yet clinched the case with Roman ceramics. *sciencemag.org*, 12 Dec 2018.

EARLIEST CROPS

Ancient hunter-gatherers began to systemically affect the evolution of crops around 10,000 years earlier than previously thought. Professor Robin Allaby of the University of Warwick has discovered that human crop gathering was so extensive, as long ago as the last Ice Age, that it started to have an effect on the evolution of rice, wheat and barley – triggering the process which turned these plants from wild to domesticated. In Tell Qaramel in northern Syria, the research demonstrates evidence of einkorn being affected up to 30,000 years ago, and rice has been shown to be affected more than 13,000 years ago in south, east and south-east Asia. Emmer wheat was affected 25,000 years ago in the southern

LEFT: The Buddha found on a beach in Western Australia – evidence for an early Chinese landfall?

Levant – and barley in the same geographical region over 21,000 years ago.

The timeline of crop evolution in these areas was traced by analysing the evolving gene frequencies of excavated plant remains. Wild plants contain a gene that enables them to scatter their seeds widely. When a plant begins to be gathered on a large scale, human activity alters its evolution, changing this gene and causing the plant to retain its seeds instead of spreading them – thus adapting it to the human environment, and eventually agriculture.

Professor Allaby and his colleagues made calculations from archaeobotanical remains of crops that contained 'non-scattering' genes and found that human gathering had already started to alter their evolution millennia before previously accepted dates. Crop plants adapted to domestication exponentially around 8,000 years ago, with the emergence of sickle farming technology, but selection changed over time. The study pinpoints the origins of the selective pressures leading to crop domestication much earlier, and in geological eras considered inhospitable to farming. Demonstrating that crops were being gathered to the extent of being pushed towards domestication up to 30,000 years ago proves the existence of dense populations of people at this time.

Professor Robin Allaby commented: "This study changes the nature of the debate about the origins of agriculture, showing that very long term natural processes seem to lead to domestication – putting us on a par with the natural world, where we have species like ants that have domesticated fungi, for instance." *phys.org/news*, 23 Oct 2017.

- A group of hunter-gathers near China's Yangtze River started to grow rice around 9,400 years ago, as shown from phytoliths unearthed at a site called Shangshan. Phytoliths are hard, microscopic pieces of silica made by plant cells for self-defence. Rice leaves have fan-shaped phytoliths and the specific patterns on those found here suggest these people were not just gathering rice, but actually cultivating it. Phytoliths in modern rice have more than nine fish-scale decorations. The ancient phytoliths in Shangshan were a mix of different numbers of fish-scale decorations – as they got younger, the proportion with more than nine increased and became more like modern rice. This is evidence of rice's gradual domestication, a process that was long and slow. *theatlantic.com*, 29 May 2017.



CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

237: WORDS FAIL ME

(Afraid all that follows quite puts Fort's famous 'teleportation' in the verbal shade)

In the finale (vv1168–75) of his comedy 'Women in Parliament', Aristophanes came up with this jaw-breaking noun:

Lopadotemachoselachogaleokranio
leptanodrimhypotrimmatosilphio
paeameliokatatakechymenokichi
wpikossyphophattoperusteralek tryonopte
kephalliokigklo peleiola goiosiraioaba
phetranganopterygon.

Allowing for minor vagaries of text and transliteration, this lexical whopper weighs in at 169 or 171 letters, long-time champion in the Guinness World Records. Meaning? Simply boils down to a multi-multi-ingredient fricassee served up for the play's concluding banquet, defined by Liddell and Scott in their standard Lexicon as 'Name of a dish compounded of all kind of dainties, fish, flesh, fowl'. Not likely to find that on a pub menu.

A glance at dictionaries of modern Greek suggests that latterday Hellenes have not yet broken the 30-letter barrier, an impression confirmed by relevant Wikipedia notices.

Latin can't compete, though to judge by Horace's animadversions (*Art of Poetry*, v97) on sesquipedalian verbiage – in English, a complaint levelled against Dr Johnson – there were those who tried.

Greek-style compounds seem to have been a feature of the earliest Roman writers. A well-documented case in point was the poet Lævius who specialised in archaising tongue-twisters that do not make one regret he survives only in fragments. Samples of his vocabulary are listed and discussed by Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights*, bk19 ch7, concluding that such are all right in poetry but not right for prose.

Gellius's litany of ever-increasing monsters culminates with *Subductisupercilicarptor*, defined by the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* as "An eyebrow-raising fault-finder". Apparently too much to swallow for Lewis & Short, the *OLD*'s predecessor who left it out.

Despite his "small latine and less greeke," Shakespeare's longest word is this bit of cod Latin, spoken by Costard when ridiculing pedants in *Love's Labour's Lost* (Act 5 Scene 1): "O, they have lived long on the alms-basket of words. I marvel thy master hath not eaten thee for a word; for the art not so long by the head as *honorificabilitudinitatibus*: thou art easier swallowed than a flap-dragon."



I gather flap-dragon was a game in which you tried to eat hot raisins from a bowl of burning brandy – might catch on if revived. Bill's weighty word comprises the dative and ablative plurals from a mediæval noun, translatable here as "the state of being able to achieve honours".

Michael Quinion on his World Wide Words website points out that this was not actually the Bard's invention, being attested in an 1187 Charter, in Dante and Rabelais, and an anonymous 1548 tract, *The Complaynte of Scotland* – tailor-made for Salmond and Sturgeon.

Quinion also discloses a Latin anagram within this monster that translates as "These plays, F Bacon's offspring, are preserved for the world," crediting this discovery to Sir Edwin Lawrence-Durning's *Bacon is Shakespeare* (1910). Quinion sardonically observes: "This is all nonsense, of course – as every schoolboy knows, they were really written by Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford." Yes, Michael, and every schoolgirl knows they were really written by Anne Hathaway.

Excluding scientific-technical compounds, the longest proper English word is usually said to be floccinaucinihilipilification, signifying 'pettiness' or 'estimating as of little value'.

I traced its history in *Verbatim* 25.1 (2000), 23-4, accessible online. Sounds like a Johnsonian blunderbuss – the Great Cham did defend the use of "hard words" in an *Idler* essay, and Scotch hagiographer Boswell pronounced: "Mr Johnson has gigantick thoughts, and therefore must be allowed gigantick words."

This verbal colossus was actually imported into English by one of Johnson's poets, William Shenstone (1714-63), although supposed to be a coinage by

pupils slogging through the *Eton Latin Grammar*, being a jumble of Roman phrases equivalent to our 'not giving a jot/monkey's/toss for'. Used in a letter, not a poem, the word was revived after a 60-year hibernation by Robert Southey (1816) and Sir Walter Scott (1829).

Johnson was frequently ridiculed for his sesquipedalianism, being nicknamed 'Lexiphanes' after a character mocked in Lucian's eponymous dialogue for coining monstrous neologisms. Our Eton-Shenstone effort was frequently surpassed by – no surprise – James Joyce, who has 10 100-letter confections in *Finnegan's Wake*, led by a 101-oner describing the thunderclap signalling the expulsion from Eden of Adam and Eve – look it up yourselves or go to the exegeses of Anthony Burgess, the only person ever to claim he understood the whole thing.

If we included scientific compounds, the runaway winner is the definition of the protein Titin, clocking in at 189,819 letters. Haven't had the courage to look into this, let alone spell it out, relying (fingers crossed) on the Wikipedia catalogue of longest words in various modern languages, unsurprisingly dominated by the likes of Finnish (how on Earth do even Finns learn this longitudinal lingo?) and German, though Sanskrit takes first prize with one of 431 letters, contrasting with (say) Arabic which does not reach beyond 15 letters.

Back to the Romans, who extended this hyper-verbosity to proper names, both in fiction and fact. In Plautus's play 'The Persian' (Act 4 Scene 6. 20-23), a character introduces himself as:

*Vaniloquidorus Virginisvenonides
Nugipolyloquides Argentumexteribronides
Tedigniloquides Mummorumexpalponides
Quodsemelarrripides Nunquampost reddides.*

A somewhat anti-semitically-tinged Englishing in Paul Nixon's old (1916) Loeb rendered some of this as "Girlsellerinsky, Cashqueezerouter, Whatyouhaveoncegrabbedstein, Neverletitgo again."

One of the Roman consuls for AD 169 styled himself: Q. Pompous q.f. Senecio Roscius Murena Coelius Sex. Julius Frontinus Silius Decianus C. Iulius Eurycles Herculaneus L. Vibullius Pius Augustanus Alpinus Bellicius Sollers Iulius Aper Ducenius Proculus Rutilianus Rufinus Silius Valens Valerius Niger Cl. Fuscus Saxa Uryntianus Sosius Priscus.

Try getting that on your ID Card....



Sometimes they come back

ALAN MURDIE asks whether poltergeists ever return to their old haunts – even centuries later...

All over Britain there are small villages and hamlets where, as judged by formal historical scales and standards, very little has happened. On a spring or summer evening when the air is still you can almost sense the peace that permeates these small communities that were first mentioned in the Domesday Book. Dagworth in Suffolk remains one such place, remaining the type of quiet, rural settlement that poet Thomas Gray contemplated in 1750 in his famous *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*. Their historical records are a long roll of births, marriages and deaths, together with manorial, agricultural and ecclesiastical returns attached to the seasonal cycles and providing the short and simple annals of the poor over many generations. So it is with Dagworth, its small size and agricultural character securing it few mentions in written histories of the county of Suffolk, little having interrupted its quiet and peaceful rhythms over the centuries.

Basically, very little has happened at Dagworth in major historical terms for a very long time. In fact, it could be said that the most sensational event in its history occurred as long ago as the reign of Richard II, when a ghostly being invaded the Manor House, then the home of Sir Osberni de Bradewelle of ‘Daghewurthe’, as the area was recorded.

According to the monastic writer Ralph of Coggeshall, the compiler of the *Chronicon Anglicanum* (see **FT377:40-45**), a certain ‘fantastical spirit’ manifested in the house and conversed with the family, imitating the voice of a one-year-old child. The spirit called itself ‘Malekin’ and said that his mother and brother dwelt in a neighbouring house, and that they often chided her because she left them.

The things Malekin did and said were wonderful, could be very funny and even embarrassing. Initially, the family were extremely terrified, but by degrees they became used to his words and silly actions, and conversed familiarly with him. The entity sometimes spoke English, in the dialect of the region, and sometimes in Latin, discussing Scripture with the chaplain of the knight. Malekin often asked for food and drink, which, when placed on a certain chest, immediately disappeared. The entity claimed to have been a human child abducted from a field by fairy beings.

As Ralph of Coggeshall is considered by historians to have died around 1227, this account would have been collected by



ABOVE: Dagworth Hall, Suffolk, where the ‘fantastical spirit’ Malekin was reported by Ralph of Coggeshall to have manifested here, as did a much later poltergeist in the 1960s.

Harry Price suggested the Dagworth story might be an account of a poltergeist

him within living memory and it has been taken as an example of a folk belief in fairy changelings and the existence of small and invisible entities. In his *Poltergeist Over England* (1945), Harry Price suggested the Dagworth story might be an account of a poltergeist.

I found myself thinking further over these issues when enjoying a recent study of county folklore, *Suffolk Fairylure* (2018), by historian Dr Francis Young. This book was launched last October, appropriately enough in the mid-Suffolk village of Woolpit, famous for its long-debated story of the Green Children (an enduring and even more astonishing legend also related by Ralph of Coggeshall; see **FT57:39, 41; 222:54-55**).

As a book, *Suffolk Fairylure* may be appreciated on a number of levels. If you enjoy reading about the Suffolk countryside and lots of fairies, this is definitely a book for you. But, more pertinently, it provides a wide-

ranging and scholarly study, encompassing a great many diverse stories, anecdotes and experiences from around Suffolk, the most thorough yet to emerge. Much of this material is fragmentary, but combined together it proves Suffolk possesses the greatest concentration of fairy and elvish folklore amongst all the eastern counties (at least identified so far). Evidence of belief appears in early witchcraft trials, folk stories and curious anecdotal sightings. Whence this lore springs and what it represents are questions for study and deeper discussion, but with reference to the Dagworth story Dr Young remarks: “...the spirit in Ralph’s account resembles the much later idea of the poltergeist... who is not seen but plays tricks on the household and sometimes communicates with them.”

It should be remembered Dr Young writes primarily as a historian and folklorist, but examining the details more closely from the perspective of psychical research, one sees that this is correct. One may detect in the account given by Ralph of Coggeshall of the manifestations reported of Malekin certain characteristics familiar as hallmarks of poltergeist activity. These were obvious to Price and will be to any informed modern researcher. For example, we have references to a ‘certain maiden’ (an adolescent focus?), ‘silly actions’ (a

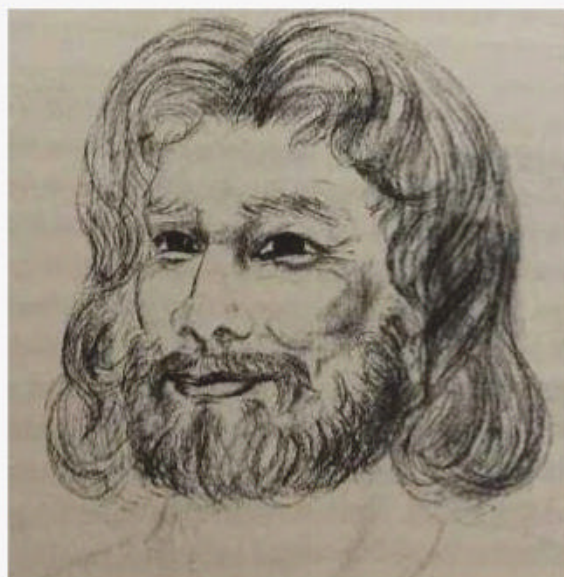
typical description of poltergeist antics) the disappearance of objects (commonplace), and reports of the presumed haunting presence being heard and physically felt but never seen (except on one occasion). All are well documented in poltergeist studies. With respect to the voice, could this even have been an example of the rare Enfield-variety of speaking poltergeist? (For another historic example see the 'Devil of Mascon', France in 1612 in *Poltergeists: A History of Violent Phenomena* (2011) by PG Maxwell-Stewart).

Historically, poltergeists have variously been interpreted as spirits, witchcraft or fairies and goblins. Concerning the latter, similarities were drawn by parapsychologist Dr George Owen in an article 'Brownie, Incubus and Poltergeist' (*International Journal of Parapsychology*, autumn 1964, pp.455-472), where he suggested that the folklore of domestic spirits and elvish beings were pre-scientific accounts of poltergeist activity attributable to the unconscious mind. Taking this view was his wife, Dr Iris Owen, who in 1972 launched the famous 'Philip Experiment' in 1972 in Canada, where members of the New Horizons group in Toronto succeeded in creating raps and table levitations in conditions emulating a light-hearted Victorian séance. They attributed their success to the collective conceit of inventing a ghost they called Philip whom they pretended was present at their sittings. 'Philip' was given a fictional pseudo-historical biography, derived entirely from their imagination. They found that by invoking 'Philip', psychokinetic manifestations would follow. Engaging in the fiction of ascribing phenomena to an external entity, they seemed to release their own unconscious psychokinetic powers. (See *Conjuring Up Philip: An Adventure in Psychokinesis* (1976) by Iris Owen and Margaret Sparrow; also **FT61:41-42, 166:37, 212:59, 227:16, 302:69, 305:73, 351:18**).

In 1972 Dr Ian Stevenson, renowned for his studies of past life memories, proposed the case for there being two varieties of poltergeist. Relatively simple and non-complex disturbances he attributed to the unconscious mind. Those involving complex effects (such as the targeted movement of objects and apparent communications) might imply a discarnate presence external to living humans. (See 'Poltergeists Are They Living or Are They Dead' in the *Journal of the American SPR* 1972 vol.66, pp.233-252). The two distinct patterns postulated by Stevenson (if not the causes) were confirmed by Gauld's statistical analysis of 500 historic cases some seven years later (see *Poltergeists* (1979) by Alan Gauld and Tony Cornell). This covered a wealth of historic cases which, when analysed in terms of recurrent features, showed a division between short-lived person-centred

disturbances and place-centred outbreaks. Gauld's research indicated that occupants of a property might change, but the poltergeist effects would later be repeated in the property. Whether the intelligence behind them was once-human or non-human (e.g. elementals or demonic) was not capable of determination.

The studies by Stevenson and Gauld raise wider questions. Firstly, can poltergeists repeatedly strike over much longer periods, and, if so, what is the origin of the forces doing the striking? These were questions not explored at the time, the dominant theoretical model amongst the minority of parapsychologists who took poltergeists seriously being that of 'Recurrent Spontaneous Psychokinesis' (RSPK) based on the assumption that stressed living individuals were producing the phenomena from their unconscious minds and because disturbances were generally short-lived. If the stress was dealt with, the poltergeist usually disappeared. One of the few challengers to this viewpoint during the mid-1970s was Guy Lyon Playfair, influenced by



ABOVE: The 'Philip Experiment' saw parapsychologists employing traditional séances and invoking 'Philip' to create raps and table levitations. TOP: 'Philip' was provided with a fictional biography.

his own study and experience of poltergeists in Brazil, where interpretations were shaped by the writings of spiritist Allan Kardec. In other Spanish-speaking Latin American countries, less influenced by spiritism, instances of poltergeists were ascribed to traditional elvish beings, known as 'duendes'. Later, Colin Wilson adopted such a view after looking into the infamous 'Black Monk of Pontefract' case (see Alan Murdie, "When the Lights Went Out", **FT293:28-37**) about which a great deal more has been learned recently.

I remember encountering these familiar elements in Suffolk with one of the first poltergeist cases I ever heard about direct from a first-hand source. This was the late Mick Brooks, a Suffolk fireman and work colleague of my father. Mick told me that when growing up as a teenager he had experienced poltergeist phenomena in his family home that affected his brother and sisters.

In 1971 the Brooks family lived in a council house in Great Cornard, near Sudbury in Suffolk. Without warning, poltergeist manifestations began, chiefly noises and object movements. There was also a cold spot and sounds like footsteps. Mick recalled their family dog, a border collie called Mitch, growling at a point at the top of the stairs; and the youngest member of the household, Mick's youngest sister, aged three, seemed to see a person standing in the same spot, a presence which she referred to as "my friend". Mick Brooks told me: "It sounded like a child much of the time... like someone doing gymnastics or acrobatics".

The most traumatic incident involved his oldest sister, who was 15 at the time. A set of shelves were removed noiselessly



GHOSTWATCH

from the wall and crashed down behind her, while she was looking out of the front windows waiting for her boyfriend to call. She suffered severe shock, which affected both her relationship and her health.

Calling in a canon of the Church of England to hold a prayer ceremony brought respite for the Brooks family for three months. Disturbances and noises then resumed. A second ceremony and blessing by the canon cured the problem, the last manifestation being three knocks at the front door. Mick told me they went to answer the door. “No one was outside. No one was in the square.” That was taken as a signal that the entity was departing and the family was troubled no more.

At the time I discussed this with Mick Brooks, I realised that as well as a poltergeist, it sounded partly like a haunting, though I did not see how this fitted the ‘unconscious mind’ theory. But with the case over and with the rest of the family having moved away, there was no real opportunity to explore it further. However, Mick was surprised to learn that over 12 years later, in 1983, phenomena were reported at the same house, with a young mother complaining of a strange atmosphere and shadowy forms appearing – so it seemed possible that the phenomena might have come back. Mick never varied in his story over the years but sadly, though originally a fit man and a black belt in judo, he later suffered serious health issues and died unexpectedly in 2000 at the early age of 48.

Concerning the issue of poltergeists returning, I was most interested to receive a letter in spring 2000 from the late Major Patrick de Vere Patey, the former owner of Dagworth Hall, concerning some ghost experiences within his family. Also included in passing in his letter was a mention of a haunting at Dagworth Hall prior to him moving there in the 1960s. This account was second-hand but it is nonetheless remarkable because of its context.

Major de Patey wrote: “One other curious event in Dagworth was that in the ‘Sixties a school inspector moved into the old part of the former Dagworth Hall only to leave pretty sharply due to what must have been the action of a Poltergeist behaving in the traditional manner. Mrs Whitted, who rented that part of the house after him, never had any trouble. Something to do with children, either his own or an association with others?” I asked Major de Patey for further details, but he wrote (22 April 2000): “I never met the School Inspector only knowing that he left in some haste.”

The present Dagworth Hall dates from the 15th century, but incorporates traces of a much earlier manor house, dating back to Domesday in 1086, erected on the same site. William Coppingers work *The*



Manors of Suffolk (1910, vol 6) records that at the time of the Norman Conquest the land had been held by one Breme who had been killed at the Battle of Hastings. It then passed to Walter de Aggerworth or Dagworth and his wife Aveline and then to his son Robert in the reign of King John.

That such a small hamlet might have two poltergeist-like incidents occurring at precisely the same location, even so many centuries apart, is an intriguing detail. With the old manor long-gone and the newer Tudor building standing on its site, the two accounts only hint (but no more) at the possibility of poltergeists striking at the same place, irrespective of the passing of time (an eight-century gap would surely be a record).

Even more remarkable is the element of child-like apparitions materialising briefly in poltergeist outbreaks, a rare but persistent feature stretching into the late 20th century (for example the Hannath Hall Poltergeist over 1957-59 – see *Poltergeists* (1979) by Alan Gauld and Tony Cornell).

Another well-attested case was the Cardiff poltergeist case of 1990 investigated by Tony Cornell and Professor David Fontana. (see D Fontana (1991), ‘A responsive poltergeist: a case from South Wales’, *JSPR* 5 7, pp.385-402). This erupted in a mechanical engineering repair business and included the throwing of stones, coins or bolts, all impacting on the walls or floor and occasionally hitting someone harmlessly, and keys disappearing. Planks of wood were thrown violently into the workshop, originating apparently in the yard outside, and loud knocks were heard. A paint scraper that went missing suddenly re-appeared, hot to the touch “as if it had been heated for

LEFT: The case of the Cardiff Poltergeist (dubbed ‘Pete’) was the subject of a 1994 episode of the ITV series *Strange But True*.

some minutes with a blowlamp”. Although there were no voices, a couple who worked at the firm were plagued with telephone calls day and night (including on one occasion every few minutes throughout an entire afternoon) but the line was dead on answering. British Telecom engineers checked, but could find no faults.

Seen on three occasions was the partially formed and diminutive apparition of a small boy, dressed in what appeared to be a school uniform and cap, but with “no face under the cap, and no outline of hands or bare knees”, sitting on a shelf near the ceiling. Psychical researcher John Randall made a bold attempt to advance a far-fetched theory that this apparition was a living school boy prankster, possibly from an ethnic minority or with his face blackened (although his idea of what school boys looked like in the late 1980s seemed to be extracted from a *Just William* story rather than the facts). Enquiries indicated there were no schools in the vicinity that included caps as part of their uniform and no faceless and handless schoolboys were identified locally. More pertinently, the retail shop lacked any suitable hiding place even for the smallest of 12-year-old boys. It was left to Dr Serena Roney-Dougal in her book linking psi phenomena and traditional spiritualities and beliefs to point out that the form fitted the folkloric idea of elvish or goblin infestation, such beliefs also being prevalent in Germany. (*The Faery Faith* (1991) by Serena Roney-Dougal).

In my view it will take a lot to shift the perspective that poltergeists predominantly originate from the unconscious minds of the living. Much stronger evidence would be needed to displace such a view, but equally it must be acknowledged that an unconscious origin theory is inadequate in a minority of cases or sufficient to cover many observations accumulated over the years.

As a final note, what makes this particular story potentially even more interesting is Dr Young’s own contact with some more recent occupants of Dagworth Hall when researching his book. Speaking at a meeting of the Ghost Club on 15 January 2019, Dr Young remarked he had been struck by the owner’s adult son recalling how his own young son, in early childhood, had often called out ‘Play again! Play again!’ a phrase that Malekin had supposedly uttered centuries before...

If it really is the case that poltergeists can strike twice at the same place over such an interval, then there may need to be some fundamental re-assessment of this most enduring of enigmas.

GRAVE MISGIVINGS

Our latest round-up of premature burials, miraculous resurrections, and people who just wouldn't stay dead

CHRIS WARE / KEYSTONE FEATURES / HULTON ARCHIVE/
GETTY IMAGES

- A Brazilian woman is believed to have spent 11 days trying to break out of her coffin after being buried alive. Rosangela Almeida dos Santos, 37, was declared dead in hospital on 28 January 2018 after suffering cardiac arrest and septic shock, and was buried the next day in Riachao das Neves, Bahia state. Locals reported screams from the cemetery on 9 February, and about 500 people gathered to see the coffin taken from its stone tomb and opened. Some called for an ambulance, as the woman's feet were still warm, but it was too late. Her body had turned around and cotton wool that had been in her ears and nostrils had fallen out. Nails around the coffin lid were pushed up and there were scratches and blood on the inside. Local Natalina Silva said she heard banging from the tomb. "I thought kids were playing a joke," she said. "Then I heard her groan twice." *Sun, D.Mirror, 17 Feb 2018.*

- A newborn baby girl was discovered alive after being buried for seven hours in Brazil. The mother was 15 when she gave birth. Believing the baby was dead, she buried her in the family's back garden. After an anonymous tip, police dug her up. She was taken to hospital and, despite some respiratory issues, was in a stable condition. *Queensland Times, 19 June 2018.*

- Fearing her parents would be angry with her, a girl aged 15 buried her newborn baby near a farm in Ban Nong Kham, north-eastern Thailand. Cattle herder Usa Nisaikha, 41, rescued the child almost at once when he heard his three-legged dog Ping Pong barking and found him digging in a field. (Ping Pong lost a leg after being hit by a car.) At the time of the report, the child was recovering in hospital and the mother was charged with attempted murder. *Sunday Telegraph, Sunday People, 19 May 2019.*

- An unnamed woman was one of several people involved in a car



accident outside Carletonville, South Africa, in the early hours of 24 June 2018. Declared dead by paramedics, she was taken to the morgue. However, when a morgue worker returned to check on the body in the fridge, he found the woman was breathing several hours after the crash. "This did not happen because our paramedics are not properly trained," insisted Distress Alert operations manager Gerrit Bradnick. "Equipment used to determine life showed no form of life in the woman." At the time of the report, she was recovering in hospital. *BBC News, nydailynews.com, 2 July; D.Mail, 3 July 2018.*

- A 62-year-old woman was drinking with relatives at a party in Vasilyevka, Russia, when she appeared to have passed away. A policeman certified her as dead and took her 'body' to the morgue. However, she was still alive, and started moving while a morgue worker tried to fit a tag to her foot. She was taken to Belogorsk hospital, but died the same day from hypothermia. *Metro, 13 Jan 2019.*

- Last February, a freak wave washed Shelby Burns, 19, into the sea at night near Blackpool's North Pier, and knocked her out when she hit the sea wall. Lifeboatmen found her face down in the water without a heartbeat. She was given CPR and rushed to hospital, where her heart started beating again after 40 minutes. In her case, hypothermia had saved her. She was allowed home after six weeks. *Sunday Mirror, Sun on Sunday, 7 April 2019.*

- A 53-year-old man had a heart attack on 12 March while walking back from his brother's house in Béziers, near Montpellier in southern France. When he failed to return home, relatives search for him and discovered him unconscious by a river. It was 18 hours before he was revived; his survival was down to hypothermia, which caused his body temperature to plunge, protecting his brain and other organs. He had a body temperature of 22°C (71.6°F), instead of the normal 37°C (98.6°F). Paramedics performed heart massages for more than four hours before the man could be placed on a heart-lung machine, which kept him alive until his body temperature rose sufficiently (to 32°C/89.6°F) for doctors to make one last, successful, attempt to get his heart going. The man had several broken ribs because of the massages and needed to stay on the machine for three days. At the time of the news report, he was on the way to total recovery. "The medical team were stupefied," said Jonathan Charbit, in charge of the intensive care unit at Montpellier University Hospital. "This is a textbook case. It's also an extraordinary medical and human adventure. The probability of him surviving was near to zero." Emergency medics, apparently, have a saying: "Nobody is dead until warm and dead". *Times, D.Mail, 7 April 2019.* The classic case of hypothermic resurrection is that of Ann Elisabeth Begenholtz, trapped under a sheet of ice in a freezing mountain stream

in Norway in May 1999. Her body temperature plummeted to 13.6°C (56.5°F) and her heart stopped for four hours [FT131:8].

- After the death of Alexander the Great, his followers marvelled at his body's failure to decompose in Mesopotamia's intense heat, regarding it as proof that he was divine. Another explanation has now emerged: he wasn't dead. Over the centuries, the cause of his demise in Babylon in 323 BC has been variously attributed to alcoholism, poison and typhoid. After analysing ancient accounts and modern medical literature, Katherine Hall of the Dunedin School of Medicine in New Zealand argues that he had Guillain-Barré syndrome, a rare auto-immune disorder that left him paralysed. She suggests that his staff failed to recognise, for nearly a week, that he was still alive. "His death may be the most famous case of pseudothanatos, or false diagnosis of death, ever recorded," she writes in *The Ancient History Bulletin*.

The first signs of illness appeared after a night of heavy drinking, during which Alexander is said to have drunk 12 pints of wine. The next morning, he suffered from fatigue and "generalised aches". That evening, he drank a similar quantity of wine and experienced a pain in his abdomen, sharp enough for him to cry out. An increasingly severe fever took hold. By the eighth day of his illness he was unable to speak and could make only small movements of his eyes and hands. On the eleventh day, according to Plutarch, he died. His embalmers were probably right to hesitate, Dr Hall concludes, "although it is very likely Alexander was in a deep coma by this stage and would have had no awareness when they began their work". *Times, 29 Jan; D.Mail, 30 Jan 2019.*

For the most recent round-ups of the "Lazarus phenomenon", see FT334:10-11, 357:23, 363:12.



NORTHERN WEIRDNESS TO FULL

ROB GANDY reports from Weekend North 2019

The fourth Weird Weekend North took place on 6–7 April 2019 in what has become its regular venue, the Community Hall in Rixton-with-Glazebrook, Warrington. Glen Vaudrey had built on the success of previous years by including a number of returning speakers, who shared their new research and strange tales, to ensure an entertaining and diverse programme. As usual, barmy Barry Tadcaster (aka Richard Freeman) and his cheeky Orang Pendek Ken Jeavons provided the off-the-wall introductions for each presentation. Yet the event began on a sad note as Glen announced that Lee Walker, one of the scheduled speakers, who had presented at the very first WWN in 2016, had very recently died, suddenly and unexpectedly, while on holiday. Glen dedicated WWN 2019 to his memory.

Once again, yours truly opened proceedings (all part of my cunning plan, whereby I got my presentation out of the way first, enabling me to sit back and make notes on all the other speakers, in order to write this annual report!) I combined some articles that have already been published in *FT* with some that still are hiding on David Sutton's desk to describe a series of first- and second-hand fortean experiences involving Merseyside and Merseysiders on their trips around the country – including the tale of a phantom Concorde. I started with a quick run-through of *Old Man of Halsall Moss* cases (FT328:32-39) to set the context for several new ones that I have since acquired, before setting out a miscellany of ghostly goings-on in various locations.

Next up, Nathan Jackson detailed Big Hairy Monsters across the globe. Taking each continent in turn, he discussed whether any of these fabled creatures might be biologically plausible, biologically absurd,



or maybe even a zooform or supernatural being, challenging sources where necessary. In North America, there was the staple Bigfoot – with stories of their fighting prospectors and abducting humans – but what about the Skunk Ape and Fouke Monster from the Deep South? And was the Devil Monkey actually a misidentified kangaroo? Naturally, BHM's varied across the wide expanses of Asia; did James Stewart really smuggle a Yeti's hand out of Tibet? Similarly, Africa and South America featured the dangerous Mao and Maricoxi respectively, and the Yowie stalked parts of Australia. Arguably Europe is the least interesting continent for BHM's, unless you look at historical legends of wild men.

Glen Vaudrey then described the Risley Silver Man mystery (FT305:29). Risley is less than four miles from Rixton-with-Glazebrook, and was once home to top-secret nuclear facilities. Newspaper articles from 1978 described how Ken Edwards was driving nearby late at night and witnessed a seven-foot tall silver figure, which did not appear to have knee joints, walking stiffly down an embankment. It shone beams of light from its eyes at Ken, before walking through a



It was hairy, with pricked-up ears, hunchbacked and malevolent...

fence and disappearing. Ken reckoned that he had 'lost an hour' of time. Had he seen an extraterrestrial from a UFO, or a ghost, or even an inter-dimensional visitor? Glen's thorough investigation is an excellent example of how to approach such a fortean event, and he arrived at definitive and convincing conclusions. What was it? I am not saying, but he is currently writing this material up for a future *FT* article; so, watch this space(man)!

The afternoon saw Chris Josiffe and Chris Hill present a talk on Gef, the Talking

LEFT: James Newton tackles the Dogmen. FACING PAGE: Bob Fischer recalls his year travelling around the UK's SF convention circuit.

Mongoose (FT269:32–39), based on the former's book, *Gef! The Strange Tale of an Extra-Special Talking Mongoose*. Barry Tadcaster's introduction had Ken Jeavons amazingly transform into an actual Talking Mongoose. Or was it a Talking Meerkat? We now know which comparison website Richard uses. Chris and Chris gave a detailed and amusing description of this well-known but very strange tale, featuring Chris Josiffe's surreal high-pitched interpretation of how Gef might have talked. They quoted from the related Harry Price archive material, and provided a full history of the Irving family, back to their Liverpool roots, which provided important context. The various investigators of the case represented something of a paranormal Who's Who. Was it a fraud, or was some sort of psychological power involved? Were there parallels with the Cottingley Fairies, or with poltergeists? Forty years after the events, the daughter said that it wasn't a hoax but that she wished it had never happened.

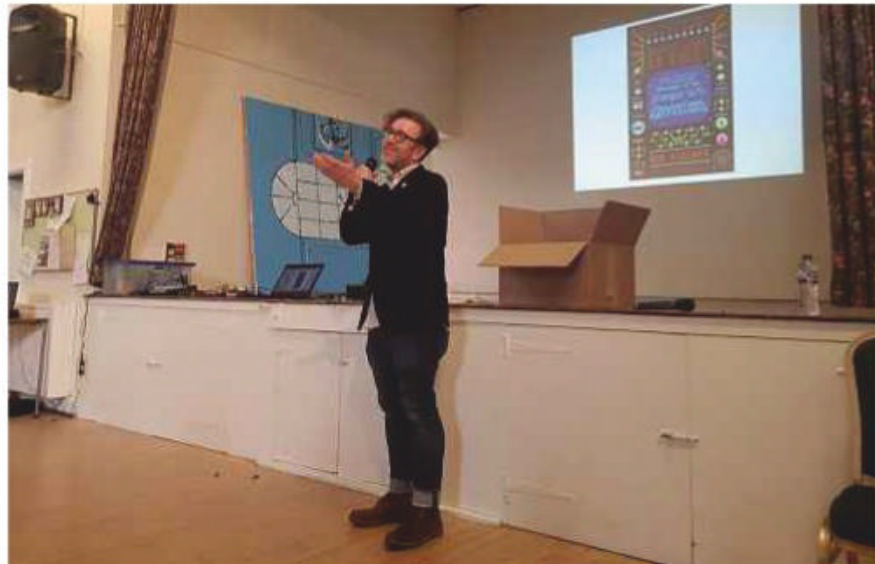
James Newton talked about a range of creatures collectively named 'Dogmen' (FT286:32-37, 329:38-41) – an image used by Hunt Emerson for the event logo. James referenced the books of Linda Godfrey and the 'Beast of Bray Road' in Wisconsin, and stressed it was no misinterpretation of a Bigfoot. It was hairy, had pricked-up ears, was hunchbacked and malevolent, and was physical rather than supernatural. Some descriptions gave it claws rather than hands, and glowing eyes. There was a link to the 1980s 'Land Between



the Lakes Killings' where the victims were torn apart by 'something'. James set out the influence of Native American lore, and described an array of troublesome, tricky canine-like entities. He finally explored the influence of imported traditions from France and the Nordic countries, which gave geographical distinctions for perceived areas for Bigfoot and Dogmen across North America.

Saturday closed with Richard Freeman describing his expedition to Tajikistan to investigate sightings of relic hominins known locally as *gul* (see FT373:38-43). He had expected them to be the same as the Russian *almasty*, but their description differed. They were smaller, with a primitive chimp-like hand structure, rather than the *almasty*'s more human-like hand; all witnesses (including a biology teacher) described weird thumbs, set well back on the hand. The *gul* were described as aggressive, throwing stones and attacking humans, and as seemingly having a sexual interest in humans. It was inferred that they were more primitive than either the yeti or *almasty*. The expedition party also talked to people, including a park ranger, who claimed to have seen the supposedly extinct Caspian tiger. Some specimens had been sighted as recently as a month before the visit, including females with cubs (FT379:55).

Andy Ross opened the second day, describing his long-time investigations into ABCs in his native County Durham. He described sightings in Shincliffe, Hamsterley Forest and on Binchester Moor. Local farmers became increasingly suspicious about how some of their animals had been killed. A Wildlife Officer was appointed to look into reports, which included more than 300 sightings over time; he concluded that there must be at least two creatures involved. Family members had personally witnessed ABCs: In the 1980s, Andy's grandfather and a friend had spotted one in the woods.



His uncle's pet dog cowered behind him when one was seen on a walk, and his dad saw a sheep being stalked. Rumours that ABCs were escapees or released from Lambton Lion Park or Harperley Hotel Zoo were discounted. The famous 1992 photo of the 'Durham Puma' with a rabbit in its mouth (see FT167:33) was shown, and sightings in 2000 and 2003 described. But since then sightings had diminished, and Andy speculated as to whether this reflected changes in the countryside, and fewer people visiting it, or whether the creatures had simply died. Hopefully not.

Pagan magistrate Steve Jones shared three personal experiences, plus the occasion he heard the distinct purring of a ghost cat! On an organised ghost tour of the South Tower of Tutbury Castle in 2008, 'something' was sensed nearby. Then a person's mobile phone went off, sounding like a surprised 'Aagh!' Steve and two others heard this sound, which was NOT the ringtone (that was double-checked). Perhaps some interaction between the phone and whatever was present? In 2002, Withernsea Lighthouse Museum yielded an enormous shining orb on one of the CCTV monitors. Steve is a definite sceptic about orbs, but could not deny this one. The room linked to the screen concerned was found to be where a lighthouse keeper had kept his demented wife locked up! Finally, in Bolling Hall, near Bradford, Steve entered a room

and felt he was enveloped by 'cold jelly'. Terrified, he left quickly. Had he walked into a ghost?

After lunch, Steve Mera discussed UFO portals and connections to the paranormal. 'Project Doorway' is an up-to-date scientific study of aerial phenomena, where specialised tests are conducted at key sites across the world.¹ Work covers subjects deemed sensitive as well as 'classified'. Phenomena utilise Positive Magnetic Anomalies in certain locations, with some evading iron, producing gravitational wells, and utilising infrasound frequencies to aid activities. Sometimes phenomena can 'glamour' eyewitnesses, with associated impacts to their bodies. There can also be conscious connection between phenomena and observers, with the former seemingly capable of measuring the latter's intent. Specialised experiments were referenced, showing UFO links to: gravitational anomalies and differentials in time; gravitational effects on laser arcing; differentials in apportionment analysis; biochemical traumatology and stresses; and a South Atlantic anomaly relating to the decay and collapse of the magnetic field. Steve mentioned related goings-on with the US Defense Department, some of which seem designed to divert interest away from important facts.

The WWN Quiz saw Team 2 the victors – winning highly desirable Nazi Dildo Guns! The runners-up received yodelling

pickles. Possibly the most challenging question was: what form did the pig-strangling Runcorn Poltergeist take when it manifested? (Answer: a seven-foot tall, amorphous black cloud with horns.)

The event concluded with FT's 'Haunted Generation' columnist, the always entertaining Bob Fischer, talking about his 2008 book *Wiffle Lever To Full!* This described a year (2006) which he spent travelling around British cult TV and science-fiction conventions and how this helped him reconnect with his childhood love of shows such as *Doctor Who*, *Blake's 7*, *Star Trek*, *The Hitch-Hikers Guide To The Galaxy*, *The Prisoner*, *Robin of Sherwood*, *Monty Python* and *Red Dwarf*. He gave readings from the book, including the traumatising effects of the final episode of *Blake's 7*, when all the main characters were killed off, just four days before Christmas! Bob also showed slides from the most surreal event he ever attended: a water-pistol fight between *Blake's 7* and *Hitch Hiker's Guide* fans, in Winspit Quarry in Dorset. He still bears the scars.

WWN goes from strength to strength and this year the total attendance was over 100 for the first time. The talks were complemented by an array of stalls featuring T-shirts, books, paintings, and herbal products, as well as Hunt Emerson drawing caricatures and selling his comic books.²

Glen Vaudrey should be applauded for all his hard work putting on the event. So, be warned: you might need to book early for WWN 2020, which is scheduled for 4-5 April 2020. Glen already has some great speakers lined up. You can check for updates on: www.weirdweekendnorth.com/

NOTES

¹ Details about the 'UFO Investigators Training Course in Aerial Phenomena' and 'Project Doorway' findings can be found at: www.phenomenamagazine.co.uk/#/stellar-courses/4593361437

² <http://largecow.com/>



RED IN TOOTH AND CLAW | Eagle vs lamb, chickens vs fox, man vs monster, plus piranhas found in Yorkshire fishing lake

SEA EAGLE THREAT

This photograph of an eagle carrying a lamb was taken by Douglas Currie, while on holiday on the Isle of Mull with his wife. Mr Currie, 74, from Loanhead, Midlothian, said: “We saw this big shape through the sky and my wife thought it was a fish. We then realised it was a lamb and I rattled off a load of shots. The bird was struggling. It’s the most extraordinary sight.” The photograph has sparked a row over plans to reintroduce wild sea eagles to England’s south coast.

With a wingspan of up to 8ft (2.4m) and a beak resembling a meat cleaver, sea eagles are sometimes referred to as “flying barn doors”. They were once widespread throughout the British Isles but had declined by 90 per cent by the time of the Industrial Revolution. The last bird was shot in 1918. In the 1970s, however, they were reintroduced in Scotland, and have since flourished. There are currently 130 breeding pairs, and the population is predicted to soar to 700 pairs by 2040. However, crofters have complained of lambs going missing, and of bloodied corpses found miles from home. Others have found animals with their eyes pecked out and limbs ripped off. According to one report, the sea eagles have even developed a taste for their smaller cousins, golden eagles.

Even so, the birds will soon be reintroduced to England, after a group of conservationists secured a five-year license. Thirty breeding pairs are planned for the Isle of Wight, with the first birds due for release this summer. Supporters have announced that sea eagles will soon be “soaring over The Needles”; but the plan has horrified sheep farmers, who claim their livestock will be picked off in their fields. Sea eagles have not been found to target household pets, although they have been known to take feral cats. While most ornithologists believe that large birds such as eagles and condors



ABOVE: Douglas Currie photographed this sea eagle carrying off a lamb it is believed to have seized from a nearby field.

cannot carry more than their own weight (about 12lb/5.4kg), there are accounts of small children being carried off, such as five-year-old Marie Delex in the French Alps in 1838 (see **FT347:44-49**; also the chapter on avian abductions in Bob Rickard & John Michell, *Rough Guide to Unexplained Phenomena*, 2000, 2007). *D. Telegraph*, 10 May 2019.

MENACE IN YORKSHIRE

On 15 April, Davey White, 37, fishing in Martinwells Lake in Edlington, South Yorkshire, spotted a dead fish floating near one of the pegs (fishing platforms). Retrieving it, he noticed its teeth and realised it was a piranha, one of the world’s fiercest predators normally found stalking the waters of the Amazon basin; they can grow up to 14in (36cm) long. Mr White broke the news to a reporter on the *Doncaster Free Press*. The lake is in a former clay pit and is usually well stocked with carp, tench, bream, perch, pike and chub, along with the usual pond life of newts, frogs and toads, plus birdlife including ducks, coots, water hens and swans. Fisherman Gary Walker said he had noticed that his hauls at the lake had reduced recently.

The day before Mr White’s

discovery, Toni Hooper, 32, found another dead piranha in the lake. “When we realised what it was, it sent shivers down my spine,” she said. “This is a popular spot among families, dog walkers and fishermen... We came here to feed the ducks and on Sunday we noticed there was only one duck and two ducklings. I’m concerned about where the wildlife is. I’ve spoken to others who have said they’ve noticed there aren’t as many ducks.”

Gill Gillies, assistant director of environment at Doncaster council, said that given the natural habitat of piranhas, it was “highly unlikely” either of the fish was alive at any time in the lake. “We assume that these were pets that were placed in the lake,” she said. “The presence of a piranha is somewhat of a novelty, so they have since been taken away by the Environment Agency for testing. In any event, we would always strongly advise against anyone paddling or swimming in this or any lake due to the dangers of deep water.”

Known for their sharp teeth and powerful jaws, piranhas are known to have killed humans, though attacks on people are rare. Human attacks normally

take place when the fish are stressed, such as when water levels are lower during the dry season and food is scarce. Splashing attracts them, so victims tend to be children. In 2011, a drunk 18-year-old was eaten in Bolivia after he leapt into a river. A Brazilian girl aged five was killed by a shoal of piranha in 2015. *theguardian.com*, 17 April; *Times*, *D.Mail*, *Sun*, 18 April 2019.

BEAST OF BADEN

Marco L, 21, was left with cuts all over his face and his arm in a cast after a bizarre attack by a “mysterious and highly aggressive amber-eyed beast” that ripped open his tent during the night of 13 May, while he was camping with friends near Waiblingen in Baden-Württemberg. “I woke up and felt a sharp burning sensation on my neck,” he said. “Suddenly, something grabbed my right hand and bit me. Sharp teeth pinched into my arm. The animal bit me, flinging my arm back and forth. This must be a nightmare I thought.” He tried to hit the creature and wake his two friends who were camping with him. “The animal did not let go of me. I yelled: ‘Help! Wake up! I’m being attacked



ABOVE: Davey White with the piranha he found in Martinwells Lake in Yorkshire.

by something'. When the animal let go of me, I saw a lot of blood." The creature then returned and Marco grabbed a pillow to fend it off. "The animal bit into the pillow. I saw two amber-coloured eyes right in front of me." Only when he switched on his mobile phone light and his friends also put on their lights did the animal run off.

Marco had cuts all over his cheek and bite wounds in his neck. He underwent surgery on his hand and received post-trauma rabies treatment, which normally involves several booster vaccines as well as special antidotes. He feared the creature might carry rabies, which causes inflammation of the brain of the animal, which can result in bizarre and often highly aggressive behaviour. Rabies is lethal for humans, and there is no known cure for the viral disease once symptoms start to appear. Experts from the state's Ministry of the Environment investigated traces found in the garden to determine the mysterious creature's identity. *Sun online*, 14 May 2019.

CHICKEN KARMA

Last March, a young fox aged about six months, snuck into a chicken coop at dusk at a farm school in Brittany, northwestern France, and become trapped inside by light-controlled automatic hatch doors that close when the sun goes down. Chickens, like all birds, are the

descendants of dinosaurs – and this particular coop held 3,000 hens. The birds channelled their inner Tyrannosaurus rex and attacked the fox. "There was a herd instinct, and they attacked him with their beaks," said Pascal Daniel, head of farming at the agricultural school Le Gros Chêne (The Big Oak). "It had blows to its neck, blows from beaks." Students discovered the fox's dead body in a corner of the coop the following morning when making their rounds to check on the chickens. The farm is home to up to 6,000 free-range chickens, kept in a five-acre site. The coop is kept open during the day and most of the hens spend the daylight hours outside, unless they are laying eggs.

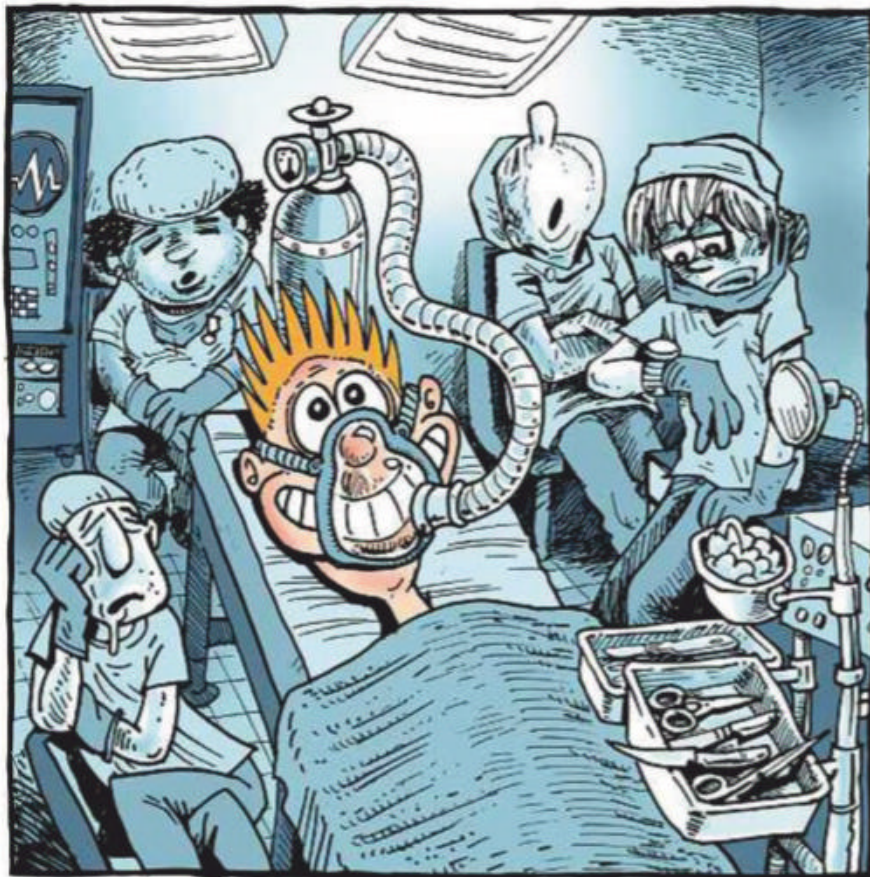
Such turning-of-tables has a precedent: in 2010, three hens called Izzy, Pongo and Pecky (with the help of a large cockerel) killed a fox that invaded their coop in Basildon, Essex. *[AFP] theguardian.com*, 12 Mar; *livescience.com*, *BBC News*, *D.Mail*, 13 Mar 2019. For a fox killed by chickens in 2010, see "Chicken coup", **FT262:6**.



MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

238: ANÆSTHESIA



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

The myth

People with red hair need higher doses of anæsthetics than others, because they carry a mutant gene, MC1R, which makes them resistant to general anæsthesia, and possibly to local anæsthetics too.

The "truth"

Many beliefs about redheads, I suspect, are based on a sense of natural justice: they must pay for their overwhelming gorgeousness by means of extra suffering. This particular story is, apparently, widely believed even by members of the medical profession. It seems to be chiefly based on a 2004 study of just 20 patients; however, in 2013, the same research team found that "anecdotal impressions" concerning redheads and anæsthetic were "unsubstantiated". Much larger studies have arrived at the same conclusion, that there is "no evidence that a patient's natural hair colour meaningfully affects anæsthetic requirement". For now, that's where the consensus lies. Perhaps the strangest truth about general anæsthetic is that nobody knows how it works. It's been around for a century and a half, it's enormously successful and is used thousands of times a day, but it remains one of medicine's greatest mysteries. Its effect is thought to be closer to coma than to sleep, and to involve interference in communication between brain cells. And by the way, did you know that the second stage of anæsthesia is the "excitement stage", characterised by "delirious behaviour"?

Sources

<https://gingerparrot.co.uk/2018/08/the-never-ending-debate-redheads-and-anaesthesia/>; <https://www.everydayhealth.com/news/surprising-facts-about-anesthesia/>; www.technology.org/2018/01/11/how-does-general-anaesthesia-work-no-one-knows-but-now-we-are-close-to-the-truth/; www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/265592.php

Disclaimer

It's possible that a practising anæsthetist would have a clearer idea than a magazine columnist would of the truth of this matter. Therefore, those wishing to defend the Painful Ginger Hypothesis are invited to write in to the letters page, whilst counting slowly to 10.

NECROLOG

This month, a pair of paranormal investigators are reunited on the other side; plus, farewell to an idiosyncratic archivist and the 'Headington Shark' man



ABOVE: American ghost hunters Lorraine and Ed Warren, photographed in 1980.

LORRAINE WARREN

Lorraine Moran (as she then was) attended Loralton Hall, a private Catholic school in Milford, Connecticut, where at the age of nine she is said to have remarked to a fellow student: "Look, Sister Joseph's lights are brighter than Mother Superior's". She was allegedly seeing human auras, and thought that everyone could see them. She professed to be a clairvoyant and a light trance medium.

Edward Warren Miney (1926-2006) was a US Navy veteran from WWII and former police officer who became a self-taught demonologist. He had known Lorraine since they were both teenagers and they married in 1943. In 1952 they founded the New England Society for Psychic Research (NESPR), the oldest ghost hunting group in New England. They claimed to have investigated over 10,000 cases during their career, including Amityville (leading to the movie *The Amityville Horror*) the West Point ghost, the Perron farmhouse in Rhode Island

(subject of *The Conjuring*), and the case of poltergeist activity at 966 Lindley Street, Bridgeport. They travelled around the world lecturing about demons, the supernatural and psychic phenomena, wrote numerous books, and ran an Occult Museum in Monroe, Connecticut, featuring artefacts from their investigations. In *The Conjuring* (2013), Vera Farmiga played the role of Lorraine and Patrick Wilson portrayed Ed. The duo reprised their roles for *The Conjuring 2* (2016), about the Enfield Poltergeist. The poster for the latter film stated that it was "based on the true case files of the Warrens". Guy Lyon Playfair, author of the main work on the Enfield case, *This House is Haunted* (1980, 2013), said that their involvement with the investigation was limited to a couple of visits to the house, at one of which Ed Warren declared he considered it would be possible "to make a lot of money out of this". Playfair added: "I don't remember anyone commenting about them

at all. They were just two more uninvited visitors who came and went." For a full examination of the Warrens' (non) involvement, see <http://tomruffles.blogspot.co.uk/2016/01/ed-and-lorraine-warren-and-enfield-demon.html>

As Alan Murdie commented: "*The Conjuring 2* has been seen as a film with Catholic themes. Since Catholicism emphasises the importance of truth, it is necessary to put the record straight... those who want the truth on the case should acquaint themselves with the evidence by going to Guy Playfair's book and the original data and records. The Enfield Poltergeist was genuine. *The Conjuring 2* is fiction like *Harry Potter*!" Let's give the Warrens the benefit of the doubt: perhaps the claim to have investigated the Enfield case was made by the movie's publicity machine without consulting them.

Lorraine Rita Moran, afterwards Warren, paranormal investigator, born Bridgeport, CT 31 Jan 31 1927; died Monroe, CT 18 April 2019, aged 92.

EDDA TASIEMKA

Tasiemka was revered by many journalists as the owner of the best cuttings library in Britain. It was unique in that it included articles cut from magazines as well as newspapers, and from German, French and Swiss publications. It was all kept in her house in Hampstead Garden Suburb, north London. Even her kitchen, bathroom and garage were stuffed with clippings. Edda Hoppe was born in Hamburg, the daughter of Paul Frolich, a communist leader and biographer of Rosa Luxembourg, who was forced into exile in the US when Edda was a baby. After WWII, she worked as a secretary for the British Army of Occupation in Hamburg, and in 1949 she met Hans Tasiemka, an interpreter at the War Crimes Trials Centre. He was a left-wing Jewish journalist who had fled to Paris at the outbreak of war and joined the French Foreign Legion and eventually, the British Army. He was in the habit of carrying around pieces of paper that tended to overflow from his pockets and fall to the ground. "When I asked him what they were, he said, 'They are cuttings'," she recalled in 2016. "That's how it all started." They relocated to London and married, moving into the Hampstead Garden Suburb house in 1962. Hans died in 1979, and Edda registered the collection as the Hans Tasiemka Archives in his memory. The clippings are now in the care of documentary producer James Hyman. Edda had a most peculiar collection of china figurines of women suckling animals, mainly sheep. "I do like sheep," she explained, and indeed, she had two life-size model sheep in her drawing room.

Edda Hoppe, afterwards Tasiemka, archivist, born Hamburg 5 Aug 1922; died London 30 Mar 2019, aged 96.



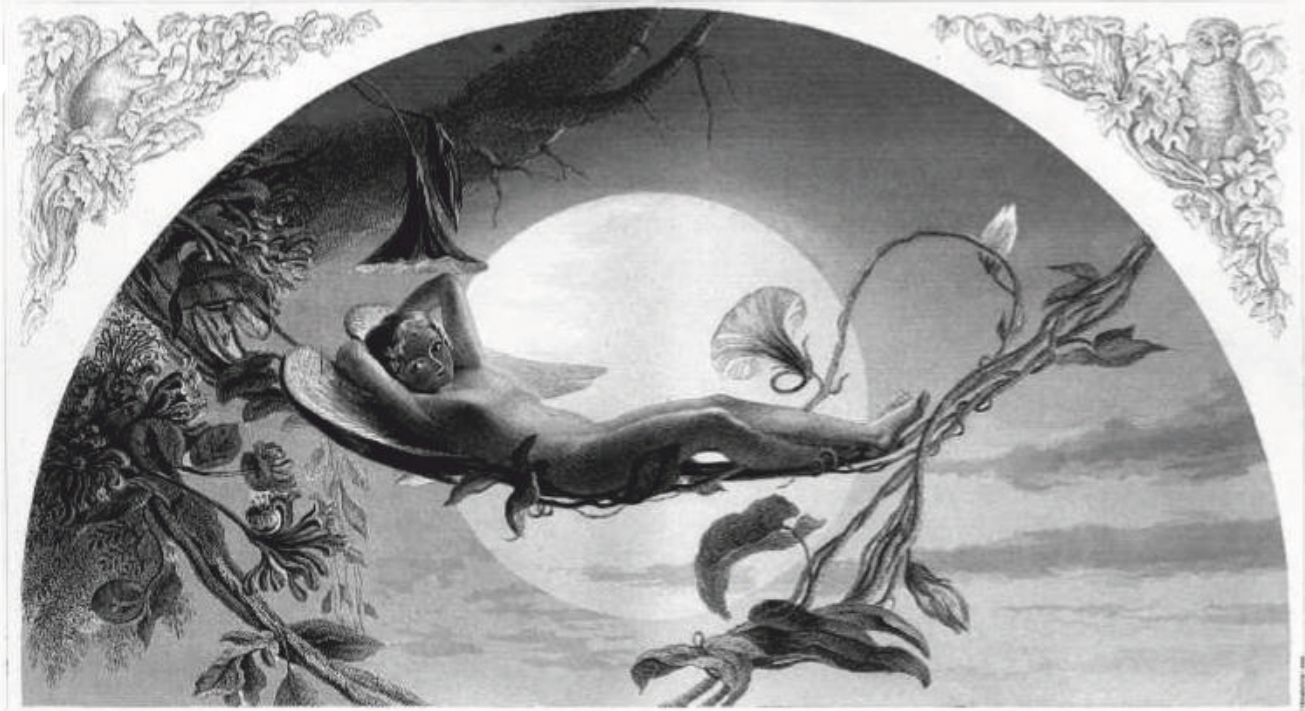
HENRY FLOWER / CREATIVE COMMONS



BILL HEINE

Heine was a local journalist and radio presenter, an independent cinema entrepreneur and the man who made headlines for sticking a shark on the roof of his house in Headington, Oxford. The 25ft (8.7m)-long fibreglass fish named *Untitled* 1986 was installed at 2 New High Street on 9 August 1986. Designed by sculptor John Buckley and erected without planning permission on the 41st anniversary of the dropping of the atom bomb on Nagasaki, it was intended as a protest against the US bombing of Libya and as a statement about nuclear weapons. It was erected, Heine said, “to mark the absurd, surreal and dangerous things happening in the world today.” The shark provoked a storm of nimbyish outrage and brought repeated call from Oxford City Council to remove it. Heine fought a six-year battle with the council that ended in 1992 when the Environment Secretary Michael Heseltine intervened and granted retrospective planning permission. The shark appeared on the cover of *Fortean Times* # 73 in 1994 as a symbol of fish-falls everywhere, and in 2018 council members backed a project to protect it as a permanent part of Oxford’s skyline. Heine was presented with a Special Certificate of Merit in recognition of his contribution to the city.

Bill Heine, journalist, born Batavia, Illinois 9 Jan 1945; died from leukaemia, Oxford 2 April 2019, aged 74.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

LONDON’S SEWER PIGS

Today, some 19th-century cockney forteana. In the 1800s, workers in London’s vast sewer system came across all kinds of animals. There were encounters with rats (of course), dogs, horses (!), a hedgehog, and even a seal. However, the strangest subterranean encounters involved pigs, massive, murderous pigs that, it was claimed, stalked nether London (see Michael Goss, “Going Underground”, **FT105:24-26**).

We are inclined to see pigs today – post *Charlotte’s Web* and *Babe* – as cute porkers, deserving of apple cores and nose-scratches. But the Victorians knew better. When a pig appeared in their newspapers it was typically because said pig had savaged a child. Understandably, those who patrolled the sewers would have been terrified to hear a grunt in the darkness behind them. How do we know about London’s sewer swine? They were recorded by Henry Mayhew in 1851. Mayhew, an early social commentator, had interviewed a series of individuals who worked in the sewers and he sceptically wrote about these porcine beasts. “The story runs, that a sow in young, by some accident got down the sewer through an opening, and wandering away from the spot, littered and reared her offspring in the drain, feeding on the offal and garbage washed into it constantly. Here it is alleged, the breed multiplied

exceedingly, and have become almost as ferocious as they are numerous.”

Is this an urban legend from subterranean London, a worthy predecessor of the New York alligators (**FT151:17, 155:52, 301:09, 303:16, 331:23**)? Or had Mayhew, usually a hard-headed man, been taken in by one of his informants? On the basis of some new

bits and pieces of evidence I’d assume that this is a *bona fide* urban legend. In 1859 the *Daily Telegraph* described, in an editorial aside, “a monstrous breed of black swine” in the sewers below Hampstead (of all places). The *Telegraph* may have embroidered Mayhew’s words, but two other sources seem to be independent of him. In 1871, London author Richard Rowe quoted a sewer worker: “They do says there’s wild pigs almost as big as bears in some

shores [sewers].” Then, in 1883, one Vernon Morwood described how 30 years before – at about the time that Mayhew was writing – a man had found a pig in the London sewers and, with much struggling, had got it above ground. The pig “was exhibited, during six months, in a show by his captor, who charged so much admission for a sight of this sewer-prodigy, by which he made a great amount of money”. Morwood writes as if this was just another pig that had strayed into the sewers and had been rescued by the man. My suspicion is that it was exhibited as one of the fearful sewer pigs. Otherwise why would folk have paid to see it?

“THEY MULTIPLIED
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All at sea

PETER BROOKESMITH surveys the latest fads and flaps from the world of ufological research

Mendoza's Maxim No 42 states: "Ufology is a branch of showbusiness." On occasion, it dwindles into a travelling circus, which is how the latest imbroglio over the 'UFOs' seen by US Navy pilots is developing. Or rather fracturing, as fresh allegations occur. One of the witnesses to the so-called 'Tic-Tac' sighting in 2004 by Commander David Fravor and his wingmen was, according to his own account, Chief Petty Officer Kevin Day. Day was the air intercept controller on board the *USS Princeton*, where all the radar and other signals from ships and aircraft were co-ordinated and processed. Day maintained that shortly after another pilot went hunting for the 'Tic-Tac' and shot infra-red and video images of something, men in black, or anyway not in uniform, arrived by helicopter, cleaned the ship out of all records of the encounter, and flew tight-lipped away. (Other accounts say these characters were in uniform: whom can you believe?) Cmdr Fravor now tetchily suggests that CPO Day (and presumably others) is making this bit up. Oh dear. Day's story, I have to say, reminds me of those implausible tales wherein the Army, or someone, moves in on the site of a crashed flying saucer and clears the ground of every teensy-weensy bit of wreckage, but updated for the digital age. Let's see who else contradicts whom else in this increasingly laughable saga.

Well, here's another chuckle already. Along comes Keith Kloor of The Intercept to report that a Department of Defense spokesman, Christopher Sherwood, has denied that former spook-turned-TTSAAS-frontman Luis 'El Lizardo' Elizondo ever led the Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program (AATIP): "Mr Elizondo had no responsibilities with regard to the AATIP program while he worked in OUSDI [the Office of Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence], up until the time he resigned effective 10/4/2017." Oh, double dear. This is not what the DoD, in the shape of one Dana White, said before (but what do you expect? It's a goddamn bureaucracy) and not what Elizondo has claimed. He, strangely, has refused to answer Kloor's queries on the point. This revelation has been greeted with howls of rage and cries of "Garbage!" and "This is just making stuff up" from those who disagree (and disagree without confirmation or denial from anyone who might actually know for sure, of course).

Joseph Trevithick and Tyler Rogoway, in the 'War Zone' section of The Drive website, put another spanner in the works by pointing out that the famous FLIR-1 video comes



ABOVE: The *USS Theodore Roosevelt* rejoined the US fleet in August 2013 after a four-year overhaul.

from an unusual exercise: "When the *Nimitz* Carrier Strike Group [CSG] encountered the Tic Tac in 2004, it was in the midst of the first ever CSG-level operations of the initial iteration of the CEC [Co-operative Engagement Capability]." What the CEC does is fuse all the imagery, radar returns, and telemetry from all elements of the CSG – ships, aircraft, the lot, wherever they are (and maybe satellite data too for all one knows), so that a target invisible to (say) the immediate *Nimitz* flotilla but visible to another element can be engaged by the carrier, one of its escorts, or aircraft. And this was the first outing of the system. Now, wouldn't you expect some odd things to turn up, and tricky exercises for the aircraft crews, to be part of that? We might bear in mind too that this was Cmdr Fravor's first set of operational outings in the F/A-18 jet. (Which isn't to say he didn't see something weird happening in the water.)

Their grabber, though, is that the 'Gimbal' and 'Go Fast' videos come from a CSG led by the *USS Theodore Roosevelt*. "The carrier had only returned to the fleet after a major four-year-long overhaul, also known as a Refueling and Complex Overhaul (RCOH), in August 2013. This process included installing various upgrades, such as systems associated with the latest operational iteration of the Navy's Cooperative Engagement Capability (CEC) and its embedded Naval Integrated Fire Control-Counter Air (NIFC-CA) architecture." In addition, the carrier's massively upgraded 'eyes in the sky', the E-2D Advanced

Hawkeye, were having their first outing. In other words, that CSG was in much the same position as the *Nimitz* group 10 years earlier, testing highly sophisticated new kit, no doubt against all kinds of devious ruses dreamt up by those whom it might concern. All of which suggests that what we've heard or seen of what the pilots had thrown at them was, in the more exotic case(s), stuff that the military had up their sleeves (electronic or otherwise), or, more simply, pretty mundane stuff that the pilots were required to track to familiarise themselves with their new gear and what it could do. As I've said before, the videos as we know them prove nothing of ufological interest, are well below operational quality, and are probably a record of training exercises. Big deal.

As to the videos, a document purporting to be the DoD Form 1910 requesting release of same has emerged into public view. For a hefty rundown on this item, see John Greenewald's analysis at the Black Vault (www.theblackvault.com/casefiles/how-the-dd-form-1910-does-not-prove-a-public-pentagon-release). Not least of its problems is that half the form isn't filled in or signed where it should be, but the thing that caught my eye was that it referred to the videos by name – Gimble (sic), and so on. Which is really odd, since all documents in whatever form are assigned a number in the US military, and these are not cited on the DD1910 we've seen. Oh dear again. Everything supposedly evidential about this case seems to be a right shambles, daft enough to make a horse laugh.

US NAVY PHOTO BY MASS COMMUNICATION SPECIALIST 2ND CLASS CHRIS BROWN



Beam me up

JENNY RANGLES finds links between a wartime UFO sighting and experimental military technology

I love meaningful coincidences that point me in interesting directions. That is how this month's column began, when I noticed that actor Simon Pegg was born in the small Gloucestershire village of Brockworth.

Pegg is perhaps best known for playing Scotty, the engineer of the *Enterprise* in the recent *Star Trek* movies, and Brockworth rang a bell from an interesting case investigated by a BUFORA researcher. He inspired my interest in an unusual side of the UFO mystery known as 'solid light' – beams of energy that act as if they possess physical attributes. In *Star Trek*, Scotty controls the transporter device and is associated with the catchphrase 'Beam me up'. It seemed apt to look anew at that Gloucestershire hamlet.

Mark Brown investigated this case in 1981 and I recall my excitement on first receiving his superbly documented research. A 1939 close encounter is extraordinary enough on its own account, but few were this interesting.

The witness, Fred, was 30 at the time of the incident. It was about 7am on 13 November, and he was heading to his reserved occupation war work, just two months into hostilities. As a building contractor, he was tasked with the rapid expansion of the Gloster Aircraft factory, as it was a vital base for RAF aircraft production with the threat of Nazi invasion looming. He had dispensation to drive from London by car and spend weekdays at Brockworth to get the work done as fast as possible.

Approaching through Birdlip village and descending the hill into Brockworth, he passed a farm where the dog normally reacted noisily as he drove by. Yet that fine morning there was silence. Then, a strange



LEFT: Expansion of the Gloster Aircraft factory site at Brockworth, Gloucestershire, in 1939.

humming noise filled the air – high pitched, like a fine motor. Fred was puzzled but drove on until he reached a gate into an open field. Across the meadow he saw the source of the noise: a strange craft, admiralty grey in colour and shaped like a large bell. There were windows on the edge and from the base a curtain of strange blue-green light emerged that appeared to be solid, a bit like a waving skirt.

Fred stopped his car to watch as the object hovered maybe 20ft (6m) above the field. He estimated it to be 25ft (7.6m) across – as a builder he was skilled at making accurate measurements, even from 100ft (30m) away. He watched, increasingly scared, for about two minutes; then the skirt switched off and the bell shape tilted to an 80-degree angle and moved sideways across the field. But the most extraordinary part was how the skirt 'retracted' upwards into the base, taking time to disappear, unlike a light

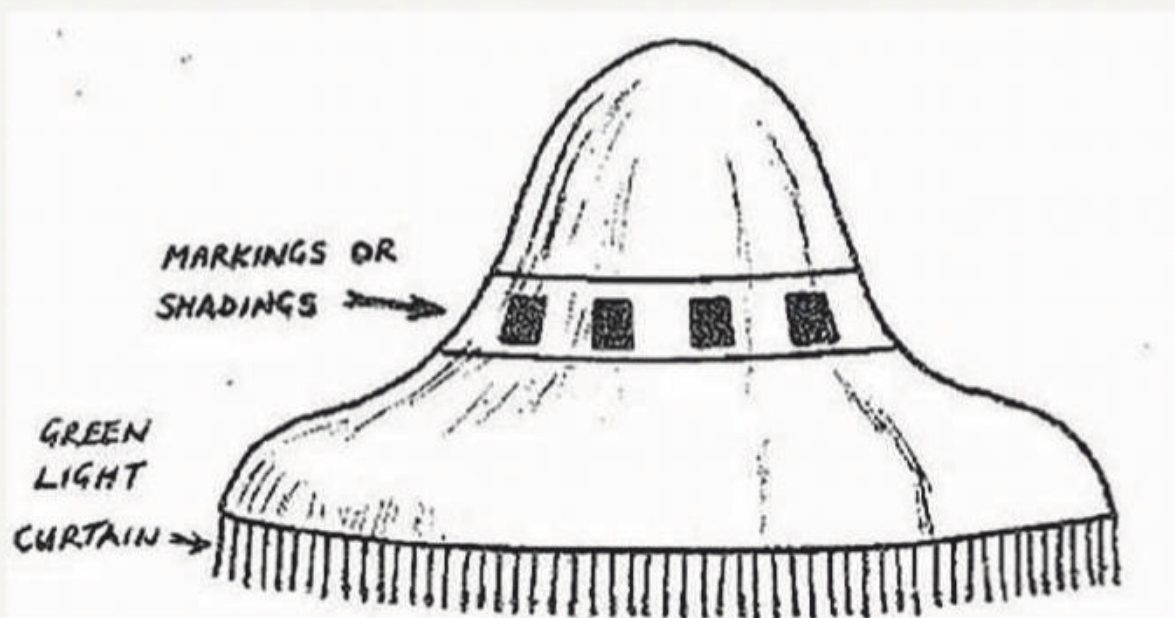
simply being switched off. It behaved as if it were solid.

After about three minutes Fred switched the car engine back on, drove to the airfield and asked permission to return to the farm to investigate. He was allowed to do so, but found no trace of the object. Moreover, there was no sign of life there, and over the next few weeks before he was transferred away he never saw any workers or animals in the fields as he had been used to doing previously.

It was, of course, 20 years or more before he saw stories of 'flying saucers'. Late in 1958, now living in Loughborough, Leicestershire, and running a pub, Fred heard a similar high-pitched noise and a green glow flew past his bedroom, illuminating everything as it did so.

Mark Brown went above and beyond to investigate this case. He travelled to Brockworth and with local police identified the farm workers from 1939 but found no record of their 'disappearance' other than the usual movement of people during wartime. He also enlisted the support of the Ministry of Defence to check aircraft movements and possible explanations, such as barrage balloons guarding the factory, but nothing was discovered. The date was narrowed down to 13 November from weather records matching what the witness had recalled.

While writing this column I discovered that a member of the family who owned the farm where Fred's experience took place had died in a cottage in Birdlip village just days before the sighting. Whether this is of any relevance or just a coincidence is not clear. However, of more interest is Brockworth airfield itself, the site that Frank was working to expand



LEFT: A witness sketch based on Fred's description of what he saw moving across a field near Brockworth.

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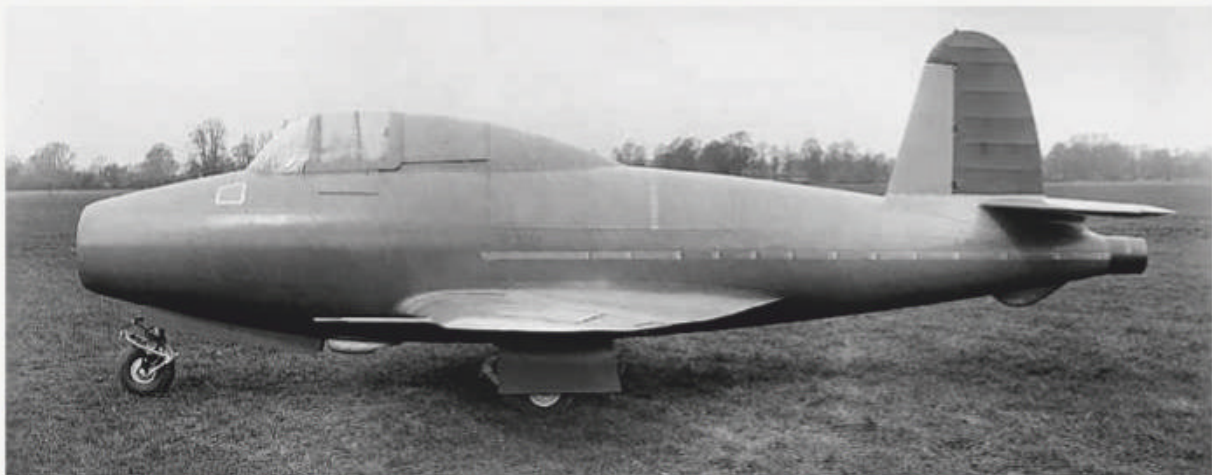
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in 1939. It had been created in 1915, in the early days of flight – the first in this part of Britain – and was employed by the RAF as an Aircraft Acceptance Park during WWI. Flying circuses used it during the 1920s, but by the 1930s the Gloucestershire Aircraft Company, which had started building metal-framed aircraft at its Cheltenham Factory, took over the airfield as a manufacturing base. Photos taken from planes then show the construction work that Frank was recruited to assist in. The company was renamed Gloster because overseas customers were struggling to pronounce ‘Gloucestershire’. Then, Brockworth was chosen to become the centre of a secret project in the early days of WWII: the building of the world’s first jet fighter.

Initially, only propeller fighters were constructed, and over 1,000 Hurricanes were rapidly deployed before Christmas 1939. This legendary plane, with the Spitfire, proved vital to Britain’s defeat of the German Luftwaffe just months later. The first jet plane made a short hop from Brockworth’s runway in April 1941 – so this location could be said to have given birth to our modern age of global travel – although full testing transferred to Cranwell. However, production Meteor jets were built in numbers at the site from 1943. Sadly, the base closed post war; a motorway was built through part of it and remnants of the runway that once saw tests for the first British jet were supplanted by a factory.

Can we infer from this history that the witness saw and heard something connected with early jet development? Though the farmer’s field was not on airfield land, my new record search found that the neighbour of the person who died in Birdlip just prior to Fred’s UFO encounter was designated a Special Constable at the time.

The inventor of the turbojet engine, Sir Frank Whittle, did conduct tests at Brockworth, but seemingly not in 1939. He first met with the designers of Gloster Aircraft to plan a prototype jet seven months



ABOVE: Britain’s first jet aircraft, the Gloster E.28/39 prototype, in April 1941, prior to getting its RAF colours.

before Fred’s sighting and did agree to secret construction of two prototype jets in 1940 – one built nearby, though elsewhere, in case Brockworth was badly hit by ongoing air raids during construction. No prototype flew before April 1941, but engine testing was continuous before then. Meteors built at Brockworth became the only jet aircraft operated by any of the allies during World War II and the only plane able to catch and stop Nazi V rockets.

So was Fred somehow witness to a secret jet engine trial on land near the base? And, if so, what did he witness? A flatbed field test gone awry? Whittle had first successfully fired his engine indoors in April 1937 and Henry Tizard, coincidentally then coordinating a secret group perfecting radar near Rendlesham Forest, championed its funding. By March 1938 they were working under secrecy in Leicestershire – coincidentally, where Fred saw his post-war UFO.

Can we match what Fred describes to an unrecorded wartime test in a field off the construction site? The sound described by Fred resembles what would have been, for him, a never-before-heard jet engine. But what of the ‘solid light’ that retracted into the craft? Remarkably, there are similarities with a case that happened soon after I began investigating with the local UFO group in Manchester in the early 1970s (see **FT295:29**).

On 8 October 1972 security guard John Byrne, then 43, was patrolling Cairo Mill, an old factory at Waterhead near Oldham. Although this large building started life as a textile mill it had, by then, been converted by electronics firm Ferranti to develop complex systems for the defence industry, including electronics for jet aircraft and the Ministry of Defence.

It was a clear midnight when Byrne was near the bicycle shed and heard, rather than saw, the object. It was an unusual deep humming noise that bored into his head, not unlike what Fred reported. Byrne compared it to a generator inside a closed room – something he was familiar with, though none was operating. Aware this was odd on a Sunday night, he glanced up to look for the source and saw a huge object parked next to the tower end of the mill with only Pennine moors beyond. The UFO resembled a large glowing bell shape turned on end with the flat base vertical to the sheer wall of the tower – the very same shape, at a similar orientation, reported by Fred 33 years previously.

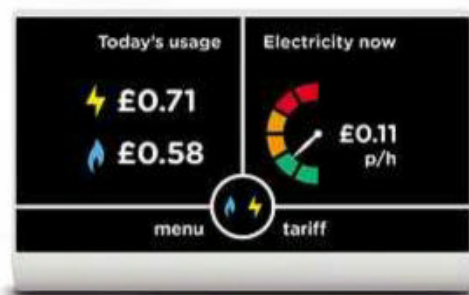
Byrne noted the object “was giving off a blue fluorescent-type light, but there was no beam. It was 300ft [90m] above and hovering”. This solid light fell like a curtain from the UFO, yet despite this glow it did not cast shadows on the ground.

Byrne watched for some minutes, and then: “It turned very sharply on edge, hovered for a minute and went straight into the sky until it was only a blob of light.” There was no blast of air as this ‘craft’ sped away, nor any noise from its departure. Even the humming did not alter in pitch (as in Doppler shift from a speeding car moving past). A second security guard yards away heard nothing.

If this sighting was not directly linked with the new jet engine we might consider the glowing green fireballs reported in the sky around Rendlesham Forest in the 1970s when experimental long-range radar was being tested there. Given Tizard’s role in both radar experiments and Whittle’s engine, could secret early radar tests have triggered ionisation in the air above Brockworth in 1939?



ABOVE: The old Cairo Mill near Warrington, where security guard John Byrne had his 1972 UFO encounter.



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BLASTS FROM THE PAST

FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

76 THE BLACK FLASH OF PROVINCETOWN

THEO PAIJMANS revisits the black-clad “sinister, slinking prowler” who terrorised a Cape Cod community



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

Of all the weird panics and ghost scares that haunted America during World War II, none has achieved a more mythical status than the Black Flash of Provincetown – and there were quite a few strange contenders.

In August 1940, for instance, Mexican beet workers in Clark County, Ohio, began to complain about a ghost they had seen near Buck Creek Lane. The ghost, they reported, was “a woman, eight feet [2.4m] tall, in a white dress with no hands or feet.”¹ In January 1941 in the city of Logansport, Indiana, a ‘black phantom’ began lurking at night behind billboards, chasing unsuspecting passers-by with a club. It was garbed in a black silk cape, black hat and mask. Local police hoped it was a prankster who would soon grow tired of his antics.² In June 1942 the city of Pascagoula, Mississippi, was in the grip of a phantom

“He popped out of the sand dunes one October evening, an elusive super-human leaping lizard, dressed in black: black hood, black cap, black face...”

barber scare that lasted well into August. The phantom barber crept into bedrooms of sleeping women and girls to cut off their hair. His attacks even disrupted the war effort, as workers abandoned their night shifts at the shipyard, afraid to leave their families. A man was caught and sentenced to 10 years in prison, although it is doubtful he really was the culprit.³

In July 1944, fear descended on the little town of Woodcrest, Missouri. As soon as evening arrived its residents locked their doors and closed their windows. Something the local

press called “The Woodcrest phantom” was on the prowl, peeping into windows at night. One eyewitness described the phantom as “a big, grey-headed fellow”. “He was looking in a window. I yelled at him and he started chasing me. I didn’t wait to find out who it was,” reported one witness. Another who saw the phantom described a short, fat man and someone swore that the two were working together. Others maintained that the phantom wore a mask or looked like a Japanese person.⁴ On the last day of August that same year, a ‘mad gasser’ began to invade the homes of the

residents of Mattoon, Illinois, using a strange gas to rendering its residents unconscious or immovable. Mrs Bert Kearney, one of the first victims of the mad gasser, described the ordeal: “I noticed a sickening, sweet odor in the bedroom... the odor grew stronger and I began to feel paralysis of my legs and lower body.” Her husband saw the gasser. “The prowler was tall, dressed in dark clothing and wore a tight-fitting cap”, he said.⁵ The scare lasted till mid-September, during which time some 21 gas attacks were reported. Clueless authorities blamed wartime hysteria. Today, some point the finger to an all too human assailant.⁶

The Black Flash is the most puzzling of this bizarre succession of World War II phantom scares. For a long time, the story of this black-clad creature that haunted Provincetown, Massachusetts, a small community at the tip



of Cape Cod, was only found in one place – an obscure book by American writer Robert Ellis Cahill published in the 1980s.⁷ He told the story decades after the alleged occurrences, but he hadn't made it up. That established itself when I unearthed a previously unknown and contemporary account in a 1939 edition of the *Provincetown Advocate* some years ago.⁸ More recently, I found other previously unknown, contemporary accounts that shed further light on the mystery of the Black Flash, this time in a 1930s newspaper, the *Boston Globe*.

Exactly when the Black Flash came into being is a mystery. "He popped up out of the sand dunes one October evening, an elusive superman, a super-human leaping lizard, dressed in black – all in black: black hood, black cape, black face, but his fierce eyes and his long pointed ears were a glowing silver," writes Cahill, placing the emergence of the phantom in 1938.⁹

Maria Costa was one of the first victims of the Black Flash. It lunged at her one November night that year. She described the phantom as "black, all black, with eyes like balls of flame, and he was big, real big... maybe eight feet [2.4m] tall. He made a sound, a loud buzzing sound, like a junebug on a hot day, only louder. Then he disappeared like a flash..." The following autumn the Black Flash reappeared, jumping from rooftop to rooftop, seemingly with a new ability: "...now, so reported five fearful and shaken witnesses, he was blowing fire from his mouth."¹⁰ During other encounters, writes Cahill, the

Black Flash in Old Provincetown Says 'Booh,' and Are Folks Scared!

Special Dispatch to the Globe

PROVINCETOWN, Oct. 23—This resort town, which manages to keep in the public eye even after the artists leave for a warmer clime in the Fall, has a new What-Is-It in the form of a hooded figure which prowls the streets at night.

Never at a loss for a name, the natives have christened their newest weird visitor, the "Black Flash," although a few still hold out for the shorter title, the "Blot." Nobody has seen the thing's face; but a couple of boys, who claim they met the apparition head-on, say it has a mouth and speaks in a guttural tongue.

Police remain adamant about tackling the Flash, philosophically declaring they "officially" don't recognize its existence, and won't—at least until they can pin something definite on it. In fact, there is a belief among some of the members of the department that the Flash has

some premature connection with Halloween.

Meanwhile the mystery remains as mysterious as ever. Two terrified youths raced 15 blocks into the lighted center of the town in the small hours of this morning after they claim the Flash rushed out of an alley at them yelling "Boo! Boo!" They said their attacker was seven feet tall and wore a black hood and long black cape.

A somewhat similar description was given by an elderly lady who lives on Bangs st. She reported seeing the Flash on one of the window sills of her home. Her cries, she said, drove it away.

Stories of the Flash have circulated here almost every Fall for the past eight years. About four years ago it was blamed for setting a string of fires which resulted in more than \$250,000 worth of damage to property.

The natives say the Flash will go away by itself after Oct. 31.

Black Flash easily jumped over 8-10ft fences, was invulnerable to gun shots, spat blue flames in a teenagers' face, and was sometimes seen in two places at once, or in different places in town over a very short period of time. The Black Flash scared the residents of Provincetown well into 1945, Cahill writes. Its reign of terror ended abruptly and unceremoniously one night, when the Black Flash was chasing some children who barricaded themselves in a house and a threw a bucket of cold water over the phantom from the roof.

Cahill's version is the most sensational and exciting, perhaps because the story got better with each retelling and he is a fine raconteur. According to the *Provincetown Advocate*, though, the saga began in 1939. The account offers little detail but acknowledges that a weird phantom did stalk Provincetown in the 1930s. We learn that the police chief was

bothered by it and that the phantom was scaring children and grabbing women. It was also capable of "jumping over 10ft [3m] hedges with no trouble at all, 'chair springs on his feet', is the explanation."¹¹ It corroborates Cahill's claim; this and the fire belching prompted fortran researcher Mike Dash to add the Black Flash to a list of Spring-heeled Jack-like entities.¹²

Surprisingly, the *Boston Globe* places the Black Flash scare even further back in time and adds a new layer of detail, including an alternative name for the pest: "This resort town... has a new What-Is-It in the form of a hooded figure which prowls the streets at night. Never at a loss for a name, the natives have christened their newest weird visitor, the 'Black Flash', although a few still hold out for the shorter title, the 'Blot'. Nobody has seen the thing's face: but a couple of boys, who claim they met the apparition

ABOVE: Provincetown, a small community on the tip of Cape Cod. LEFT: A contemporary newspaper report of the Black Flash. BELOW: Robert Ellis Cahill, for a long while the only source for the story.



head-on, say it has a mouth and speaks in a guttural tongue.

"Police remain adamant about tackling the Flash, philosophically declaring they 'officially' don't recognize its existence, and won't—at least until they can pin something definitive on it. In fact, there is a belief among some of the members of the department that the Flash has some premature connection with Halloween. Meanwhile the mystery remains as mysterious as ever. Two terrified youths raced 15 blocks into the lighted center of the town in the small hours of this morning after they claim the Flash rushed out of an alley at them yelling 'Boo! Boo!' They said their attacker wore a black hood and a long black cape. A somewhat similar description was given by an elderly lady who lives on Bangs St. She reported seeing the Flash on one of the windowsills of her home. Her cries, she said, drove it away. Stories of



ABOVE: A street scene in Provincetown, Cape Cod, Massachusetts, in 1937 – just before the Black Flash first struck.

the Flash have circulated here almost every Fall for the past eight years. About four years ago it was blamed for setting a string of fires which resulted in more than \$250,000 worth of damage to property. The natives say the Flash will go away by itself after Oct. 31.”¹³

In response, some Provincetown youths formed a neighbourhood watch: “A slinking, sinister night prowler – ‘the Black Flash’ – tonight was being sought by 40 boys of the town, deployed at spots where the behooded window-peeper and fire-setter was likely to frequent. Hidden behind trees and camped in doorways, the youthful vigilantes watched through the night for the appearance of the man who

has been frightening women with his ghostly appearance at windows and, worse, has been setting fires in dwelling houses. The boys, ranging from 14 to 19, will remain on watch each night until Police Chief Anthony P Travers and Fire Chief T Julian Lewis are certain that the menace is over. Women who have seen the hooded specter said he wore a long, dark cape that came to his ankles. He has bobbed up in various sections of the town, scaring women nearly out of their wits as his weird attire loomed out of the darkness. Small children have run screaming to their mothers after ‘the Black Flash’ leaped out at them from behind a tree, uttering throaty groans and gesturing crazily. The

authorities are satisfied that this ghostly creature of the night is the one responsible for the three incendiary fires in Provincetown.”¹⁴

Contrary to Cahill’s claim, the activities of the Black Flash seemed to have stopped around November 1939. That month the *Provincetown Advocate* briefly mentioned that the police chief denied the Black Flash was in custody: “As far as I am concerned the ‘Black Flash’ is dead and gone...”¹⁵ A month later, the *Boston Globe* observed that “the ‘black flash’, the fleet-footed hooded man who for a time terrorized women of the town by peering in windows” had failed to make an appearance: “Police have not had a complaint

about the ‘flash’s’ activities for some time.”¹⁶ I found no new accounts after that date either.

Who or what was the Black Flash? Perhaps Cahill found the answer. He interviewed residents of Provincetown, some of whom claimed to have had an encounter with the phantom. He points out that several of the town’s citizens thought the Black Flash was one of their own. Due to Cahill’s connections in law enforcement, a former Provincetown police chief offered a clue to solving the mystery. He confided to him that the creature was an elaborate prank enacted by four bored Provincetown men. But who they were, the chief wouldn’t say...¹⁷

NOTES

1 ‘Ghosts Reported in Clark County’, *Daily Times*, New Philadelphia, OH, 7 Aug 1940.

2 ‘Logansport has ‘Black Phantom’, *Republic*, Columbus, IN, 24 Jan 1941; ‘Black Phantom Only Prankster – Cops Hope’, *Call-Leader*, Elwood, IN, 24 Jan 1941.

3 Theo Paijmans, ‘The Phantom Barber of Pascagoula’, **FT254:30-31**, Oct 2009.

4 ‘Woodcrest ‘Phantom’ Haunts Residents, Doors Kept closed’, *News and Tribune*, Jefferson City, MO, 16 July 1944.

5 ‘Mrs Kearney And Daughter First Victims’, *Mattoon Daily Journal-Gazette*, Mattoon, IL, 2 Sept 1944.

6 See **FT131:35**, **FT216:36-39**; also Loren Coleman, *Mysterious America*, 1983, ch.18. For the physical assailant theory, see: Scott Maruna, ‘The Mad Gasser Of Mattoon, Dispelling the

Hysteria’, *Swamp Gas Book Co.*, 2003. For the “Mad Gasser of Southsea” see **FT48:16**.

7 Robert Ellis Cahill, *New England’s Mad and Mysterious Men*, Chandler-Smith Publishing, 1984.

8 ‘Fall Brings Out The Black Flash’, *Provincetown Advocate*, Provincetown, MA, 26 Oct 1939. See also: Theo Paijmans, ‘The Black Flash of Cape Cod: True Heir of Spring-Heeled Jack’, *The Anomalist* 13, 2007.

9 Robert Ellis Cahill, op. cit., p.23.

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13 ‘Black Flash in Old Provincetown Says ‘Booh,’ And Are Folks Scared!’, *Boston Globe*, Boston, MA,

24 Oct 1939.

14 ‘Boys on Cape Start Search for Prowler’, *Boston Globe*, Boston, MA, 26 Oct 1939.

15 ‘Chief Denies Current Rumors’, *Provincetown Advocate*, Provincetown, MA, 9 Nov 1939.

16 ‘Fourth Fire Set on Cape Cod’, *Boston Globe*, Boston, MA, 16 Dec 1939.

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THE OLD WAYS

GAIL-NINA ANDERSON explores the roots and resonance of the Folk Horror Revival, and asks whether the explosion of interest in this subgenre represents a Romantic attempt to reconnect with our lost sense of strangeness or merely an exercise in cultural nostalgia.

Imagine a past where the life of any small rural community was ruled by the pattern of the seasons, the pull of Sun and Moon, the fertility of the soil and... *the old ways*. That's not to say that there would be no Christian observance – ancient churches can, after all, enshrine all sorts of mysteries, thinly disguised under such labels as “Harvest Festival” or “Crucifixion and Resurrection”. Besides, an antiquarian parish priest might even approve of celebrating those persistent links to the land. Outsiders would be observers at best, but at worst might come to destroy any traditions seen as unofficial, retrograde or just wilfully evil. Such aggressive incomers would create clashes of culture that might escalate into violence as outside, mainstream ways were imposed, but others might get drawn in and become a part of the place in ways they could scarcely imagine.

Such imagery isn't just confined to the past, though. Imagine a present where some degree of withdrawal, emotional and social as well as geographical, had been maintained. Here the incomer would represent the modern world, finding themselves at odds with a deliberately fostered isolationism, non-progressive viewpoints, social structures and activities carefully preserved to reflect the old ways and non-urban settings that could be both enthralling and deeply disturbing.

Take either situation, add a few strange and traumatic occurrences wrapped up in circumstances mysterious to the incomer/viewer/reader and you have the essential flavour and scenario of the Folk Horror Revival. References to things weird and uncanny are pretty mandatory, although it's a *belief* in the supernatural rather than objectively perceived supernatural manifestations themselves which is essential



LEFT: Linda Hayden (and her devilish eyebrows) in *The Blood on Satan's Claw*. **OPPOSITE:** Edward Woodward as sacrificial victim in *The Wicker Man*.

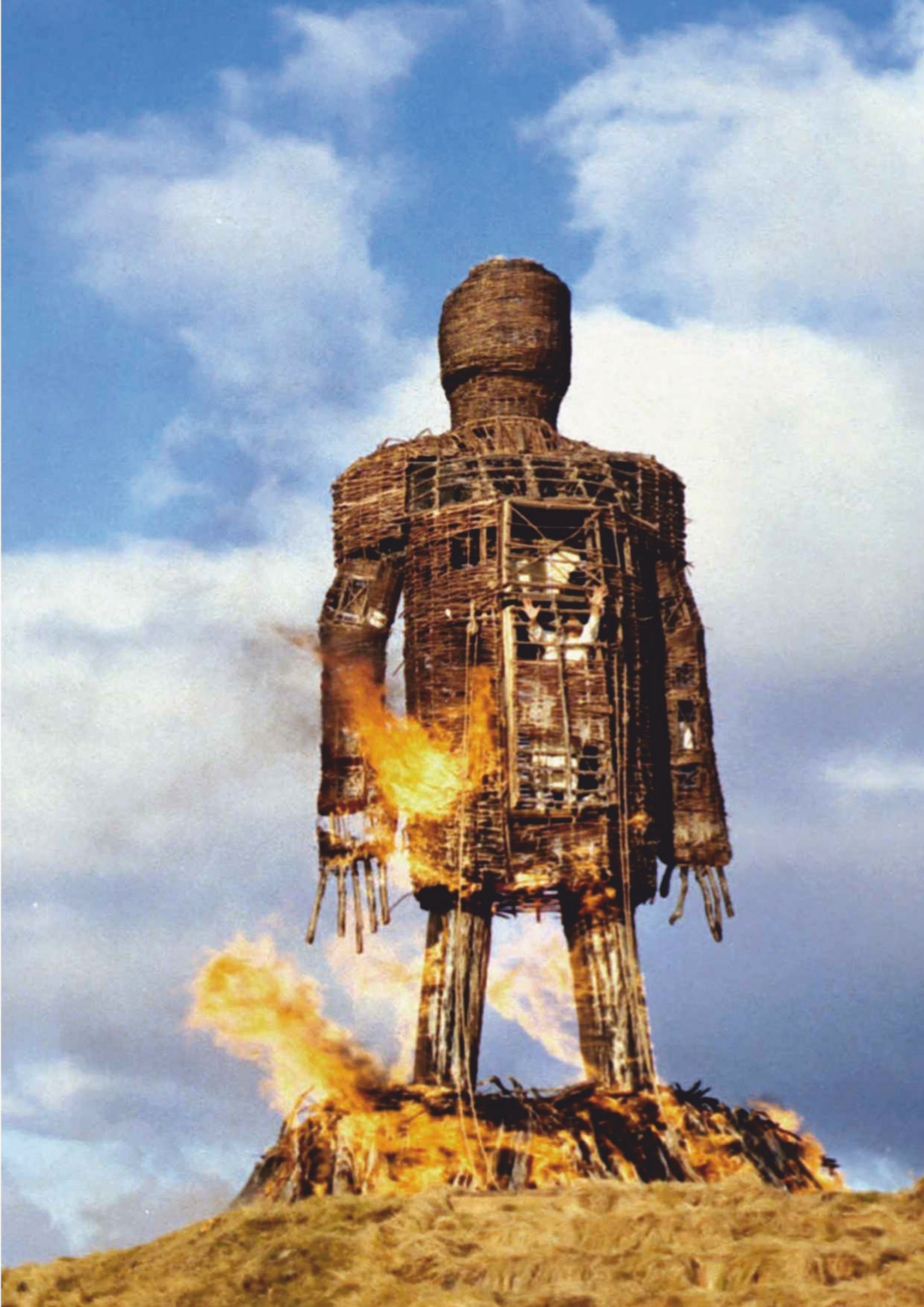
it's the natural world (or at least, our nostalgic 21st century version of it) which lies at the heart of Folk Horror. This is far from the literary tropes of Gothic fiction, with its aristocratic and scholarly protagonists, book-lined studies and dark, turreted mansions. There's no idealised sentimental courtship in Folk Horror, no cape-swirling bad barons or noble coats of arms. Ancestry here may be æons old, but goes unrecorded except in memory. Passion is of the earth, and book-learning has a limited function. The power is in the soil, the crops, the trees and whatever might animate them. It's also in the blood and in the rituals that have been handed down through unnumbered generations.

RURAL GOTHIC

Stepping back from the world of ageless appeasement offered by humanity to the gods of field, furrow and forest,² we find that from being a footnote in the history of literary and cinematic tropes, this recent categorisation has spread like a fungus across the Internet. It's ironic that revival of interest in unmappable oral tradition has become contagious via the technological wizardry of today's social media. And we should note that the phenomenon is labelled the *Folk Horror Revival*. Does this mean we are reviving ancient beliefs and practices themselves, as kindly-intentioned Wiccans and Pagans have been doing for some decades now? Or are we reviving the way the concept found compelling expression around the end of the 1960s, when the darker side of hippy philosophies about simple ways of life and a return to the bosom of Mother Earth was explored in a wave of films and TV programmes? Despite

The real dangers are likely to come from the landscape itself

to the genre. Take the trio of vintage British movies usually seen as the touchstone and reference point for the label¹ – all three deal with the terrors and promises involved in manipulating strange forces, but only one of them shows other-worldly powers at work. The real dangers are as likely to come from a clash of ideologies, a sense of isolation and the landscape itself. However we evoke it,





ABOVE: Teens turn to the old pre-Christian ways, with demonic results, in *The Blood on Satan's Claw*.
BELOW: *Witchfinder General*, despite its lack of interest in supernatural belief, is a key Folk Horror text.

having some earlier usage in the context of art history and folklore (especially where they overlap – think Henry Fuseli's *The Nightmare*; see FT207:34-35) the term Folk Horror only took on its current meaning when used by film director Piers Haggard in a 2003 interview with Mike Simpson for *Fangoria* magazine.³ Describing his 1971 film *The Blood on Satan's Claw*, Haggard said:

I was offered this job and I thought, 'I'd better find out,' so I went to a few horror films and figured out what seemed to be essential. But I was determined to make it as it needed to be made. I didn't want to breach the genre but I didn't want to follow it under any sort of enslavement. I guess I was trying to make the thing seriously, as if it was real. Also, to me the countryside was terribly important. I grew up on a farm and it's natural for me to use the countryside as symbols or as imagery. As this was a story about people subject to superstitions about living in the woods, the dark poetry of that appealed to me. I was trying to make a folk-horror film, I suppose. Not a campy one. I didn't really like the Hammer campy style, it wasn't for me really.

You can practically hear his words calling into existence an exciting new sub-genre, although Haggard was, at this point, referring to films made some 40 years earlier. It's interesting that he wanted to avoid the *Grand Guignol* stylisation of the then popular⁴ Hammer horror movie (see FT223:30-36). There's a flare of the Gothic in the morally polarised world of Hammer, even when the setting is the still (rather desperately) swinging London of 1972. An eruption of evil threatens an energetically "normal" world, while in the folk horror alternative the insidious presence of ancient demands and rewards encoded in the landscape itself casts doubt on the efficacy of any "normal" morality, making it seem like a recent palimpsest barely obscuring the more essential text beneath.

THE UNHOLY TRINITY

Along with *Witchfinder General* (1968) and *The Wicker Man* (1973; see side-bar), and television dramas such as *The Owl Service* (1969-70) and *Robin Redbreast* (1970), *The Blood on Satan's Claw* helped set the tone for a trope that only became identifiable at a distance and is perhaps only to be fully appreciated in our contemporary world of instant commodification and communication. Here, it provides a frisson of fear laced with the perversely reassuring notion that any philosophy of rationalism is twinned at its root with the indomitable magnetism of the uncanny, always tugging us towards what feel like more primal necessities and terrors. In *Witchfinder General*, based on the 1966 novel by Ronald Bassett and ultimately on the career of Matthew Hopkins (c.1620-

1647; see FT198:30-36, 367:32-39), historical circumstances, however fictionalised, provided the foundations for an exploitative piece of costume drama about the Puritanical yet prurient suppression of any rural unorthodoxy. Close examination of alternative beliefs wasn't offered, as the (usually innocent) accused were simply "in league with the Devil" and therefore fair game for testing, torture and execution. Toning down his Baroque flamboyance, Vincent Price played a chilly Hopkins, repressed and repressive, while Ian Ogilvy must be the most sympathetic and dashing Roundhead ever to appear on screen. Critically ignored, the film was popular with viewers looking for a dark alternative to the well-upholstered Victorian Gothic of Hammer's oeuvre or their American alternative, the saturated artificiality of Roger Corman's Poe adaptations. *The Blood on Satan's Claw* shows the influence of the earlier film, but its plot (rather awkwardly cobbled to together from an original portmanteau structure of three separate stories) posits the revelation of a real supernatural evil in an 18th century village. It's difficult to imagine an opening more suited to the sub-genre, as a plough turns up the weirdly deformed skull which precipitates a demonic cult among the young villagers. Some develop strange patches of scale, claw or hair which are harvested by the others, a dominant group led by a flower-garlanded Linda Hayden. The real Folk Horror identity of the movie, however, comes as Haggard suggested, from the director's innate complicity with the countryside and his capacity to reflect its absorbing otherness as the white-robed village teenagers play out their violent rites.

Perhaps that's the defining essence of Folk Horror – the mood it evokes, where





ABOVE: TV adaptations of stories by MR James (below) from the late 1960s and 1970s evoked British landscapes and half-forgotten folklore to powerful effect.

the natural world is also the uncanny realm. If we were being classical, there might be a nymph for every stream, a wild wood full of Dionysiac satyrs and a glade where the goat-footed god could be encountered, if you could endure the sense of panic engendered by his overwhelmingly non-human territory. Although one can find Christian locations that seem to radiate a numinous sense of power or peace (some of them, indeed, on the same holy sites where other deities were revered through long-lost rites), uncanny locations are hardly a central tenet of the Church of England. The demotion of fairies and ghosts from their vital (if unofficial) roles as reminders of another type of reality co-existent with our own, effectively downgraded them into mere superstition or folklore, and with them went the *genius loci*, that spirit of place which might actually be a spirit.

This denial suggests one reason why the Folk Horror Revival was waiting to happen – it's part of that spirit of Romanticism that constantly wants to connect with the essential, the unrationalised and the instinctive. This is our sense of the sublime, where beauty might be touched by awe in the face of the unfathomable or shadowed by a darker side that both attracts and repels. It's already there in our artistic traditions, in the verses and designs of William Blake, the luminous watercolours of Samuel Palmer and the equinoctial landscapes of Paul Nash. In a rather more obvious way, the grainy monotone of Simon Marsden's landscape and architectural photographs used the camera as a way of revealing the Romantic

The spirit of Romanticism wants to connect with the essential



aspects of real sites (see FT370:66-67). In older literature, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or the extended patriotic fantasy of Edmund Spenser's Tudor epic *The Faerie Queen* give it a narrative form, Shakespeare evokes it via contemporary folklore in *Macbeth* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and it reappears lurking in the inspired, automatic disconnections/juxtapositions of Surrealism. Folk horror was strong even before it was revived because it plays on those Romantic concepts that seem to bypass our daytime practicality and tap into a subconscious realm of dreams and imaginings.

MEMORY AND MYTH

Though it might seem at odds with modern media, this sensibility pervaded a memorable strand of British television at much the same time that it enjoyed its moment of cinematic notoriety. Although the scholarly ghost stories of MR James (see FT292:30-37) are characterised by a detached, antiquarian mode, still their author's precise feeling for place and wide knowledge of folklore offers the chance to read them as Romantic texts.⁵ Jonathan Miller's 1968 adaptation of *Oh Whistle and I'll Come to You* not only created a spectre of wind and rags that seemed to personify the bleakness of a chilly east coast shoreline, but also rooted out (via Michael Hordern's stellar performance) an unconscious relationship between haunting and haunted. The subsequent *Ghost Story for Christmas* TV tradition flourished all too briefly, but its Jamesian

THE WICKER MAN: THE ESSENCE OF FOLK HORROR

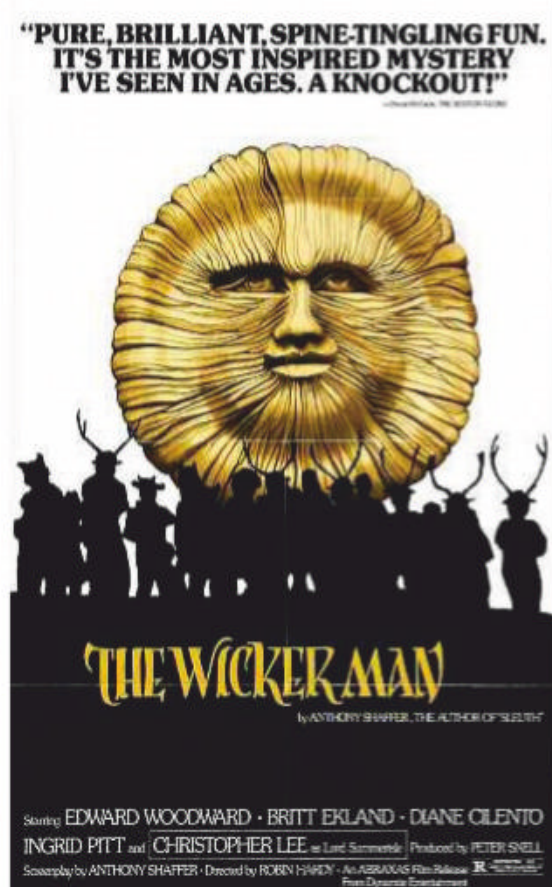


RIALTO PICTURES / STUDIOCANAL

ABOVE: Skyclad (well, nearly) fire-leapers and standing stones were just two of the pagan elements brought together in *The Wicker Man*'s *mélange* of motifs. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Other folkloric signifiers included maypoles, mummers and music. **ABOVE:** An American poster for the film.

Of the Unholy Trinity of genre-defining Folk Horror movies, *The Wicker Man* (1973) is most often cited. In 2008, *Empire* magazine ranked it at number 485 of The 500 Greatest Movies of All Time and it inspires a continuing trickle of sequels and variants, a documentary book, the odd song and a roller-coaster ride at Alton Towers, which opened as recently as 2018. Stars Christopher Lee and Edward Woodward both rank it as their best film, and pilgrimages to the locations where it was shot must have given a boost to the Galloway tourist industry. No need to be a horror fan to enjoy the ingenuity of its red-herring-strewn murder mystery structure – less a whodunit than a “what did they do and where’s the body?”

The attractions are a resonant jumble of pagan motifs, some memorably folksy musical numbers (there have even been ‘Sing-along-a *Wicker Man*’ screenings) and a protagonist way out of his comfort zone in an isolated landscape (well, a small,



orchard-strewn Scottish island retaining a resolute otherness.) A close reading of the dialogue, however, reveals it as the joker in the pack, deconstructing the tropes of Folk Horror even before the term was used. Obvious in retrospect, its brilliantly bleak climax places its audience in the position of the unfortunate Sgt Howie, wrong-footed at every turn and floundering in misinterpretation (though few of us can claim the sacrificial status of being a kingly, willing, virginal fool.)

Like him, too, we have in our minds notions of ritual murders, read about and half-remembered. Possible real-life cases include the (still unsolved) 1945 Warwickshire murder of Charles Walton (see p34-41). After having his throat cut three times with his own slash hook, this 74-year-old agricultural worker was pinned to the ground with a pitchfork driven through his face, his blood draining into the earth. Chief Inspector Robert Fabian travelled from London to conduct an



apparently routine investigation, but years later, in his 1953 autobiography *Fabian of the Yard*, cast the events in a different light: “One of my most memorable murder cases was at the village of Lower Quinton, near the stone Druid circle of the Whispering Knights. There a man had been killed by a reproduction of a Druidical ceremony on St Valentine’s Eve.”

His enhanced account might, alongside Dennis Wheatley’s hugely popular occult novels, provide a background for actor/playwright David Pinner’s 1967 novel *Ritual*, where a puritanical Christian policeman investigates the murder of a girl in a remote Cornish village characterised by strange beliefs. Its film rights were sold to Christopher Lee who, along with director Robin Hardy and screenwriter Anthony Shaffer, became the driving force behind *The Wicker Man*, though the degree to which film is based on novel remains contested. The filming was bedevilled by issues of personality, logistics and casting. Britt Ekland had to have both her voice and her bottom dubbed, while Ingrid Pitt, wished onto the cast because of her relationship with producer Peter Snell, never convinces as a dowdy (albeit nymphomaniac) librarian. Lee was splendid as the island’s patriarch, Lord Summerisle, but his and Pitt’s involvement hardly contributed to an intended distancing of the film from the Hammer studio style. Filming of spring orchards took place during a cold, wet winter: cue yards of plastic apple blossom strung from bare trees.

Shaffer’s script delivers the essence of Folk Horror: A Christian policeman, Sgt. Howie (Edward Woodward), investigates the case of a missing

girl on an island where fertile crops depend on ancient rites. Now the crops are failing and a sacrifice is needed... The film, however, illustrates anything but a rural survival of the old ways. Its folklore offers a miscellaneous catalogue of pagan motifs, with eggs and hares, protective eyes, sympathetic magic, rites of sexual initiation, mummers, maypoles, sinister cakes, naked fire-leaping (almost – the girls wore body-stockings), sexy folk songs and, of course, a Celtic sacrificial ritual described by Julius Cæsar. The filmmakers clearly rifled every available source to create this patchwork – which process couldn’t be more appropriate for their (often misinterpreted) plot. Lord Summerisle tells Howie how in 1868 his grandfather, a free-thinking Victorian scientist, spotted agricultural opportunities on a bleak island whose population made a bare subsistence from sheep and sea. He seeded not just the orchards but also the islanders’ minds, introducing a fabricated culture of “the old ways” maintained with cynical affection by his son and grandson. This isn’t survival; it’s economically inspired, paternalistically fostered revival. There’s an early clue when Summerisle refers to Willow (Ekland) as “Aphrodite” – classical Greece sitting oddly among “local” traditions, as does the decidedly non-rural concept of parthenogenesis. Over all presides the solar deity, a Sun-face reminiscent of the Roman military cult of Sol Invictus. If *The Wicker Man* defines Folk Horror, it’s with an implicit warning that the reconstructed tends to be much more accessible than the original.

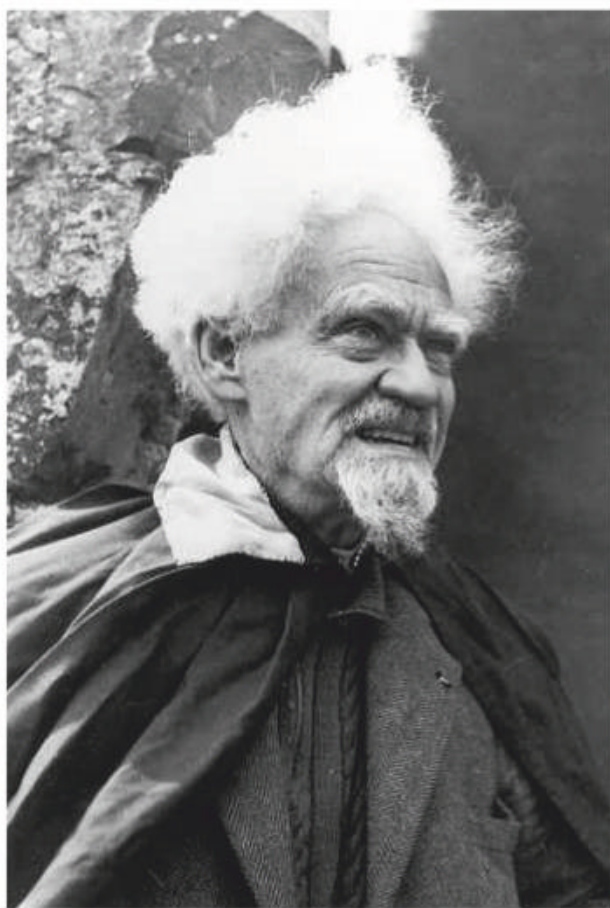
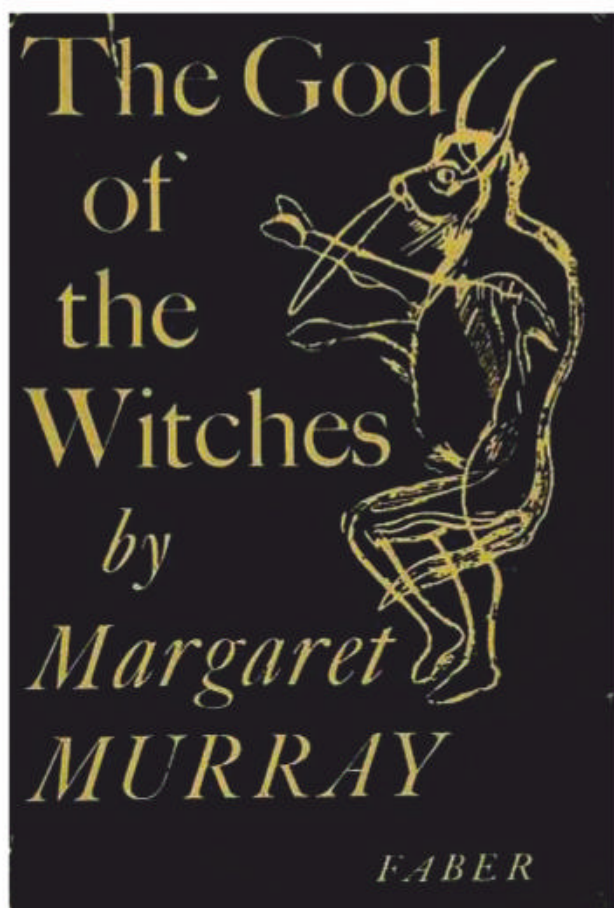


ABOVE: *Doctor Who* gets in on the Folk Horror action in 1971’s *The Dæmons*.

dramatisations included both the overtly Folk Horrific witchcraft story *The Ash Tree* (1975), and *A Warning to the Curious* (1973), whose plot of place infused with the apotropaic power of buried relics was powerful enough to send many of us on the fruitless quest to find a real folklore source for its author’s invention. The pervasively eerie series *The Owl Service* (1969-70) put many of the familiar tropes to use in a “coming of age” drama, and younger viewers were also treated to a memorable overlap of motifs when *Children of the Stones* (1977) fused threads about standing stones (one of the easiest shorthand ways to signal Folk Horror intentions) with time-slips and occult knowledge.

Even *Doctor Who* put in an excellent hybrid candidate in 1971 (Jon Pertwee era) with *The Dæmons*. OK, the ancient burial mound turns out to contain a spaceship and the demon-like Azal belongs to a race of aliens and has been called up by an equally alien Time Lord disguised as the local vicar, but there’s also a white witch, an activated gargoyle and (in an interesting variation on ritual convention) the Doctor almost gets burned at the Maypole on the village green. The vital idea of sacrifice is there too – the fact that this series pre-dated *The Wicker Man* demonstrates how pervasive these ideas had already become. *The Dæmons* plot fuses its folk horror with the science-fictional notion that aliens have long since been involved in the development of humanity and in the process have accidentally coloured our fears and superstitions. If this sounds familiar it’s because another TV series had terrified an earlier generation with the same idea, albeit in an urban setting.

Nigel Kneale’s *Quatermass and the Pit* was broadcast in 1959 when, according to my parents, it became a topic for conversation across the nation. The previous two *Quatermass* serials had played on fears of contagion and invasion via settings of worrying technological advance, but though this third outing, with its bug-like Martians and buried space-ship, must also qualify as science-fiction, it introduces



ABOVE: Modern Pagans – from Margaret Murray’s 1921 book arguing for the survival of a European witch cult, through Gerald Gardner’s development of Wicca in the Forties and Fifties, to the naked witches and swinging sorcerors of the Sixties and Seventies. BELOW: *Penda’s Fen* – the liberating aspect of Folk Horror.

the uncannier notion that ancient race-memories haunt our minds, finding distorted expression in our beliefs and mythologies. The final *Quatermass* series, shown on ITV in 1979, again has the planet under the thrall of (unseen) aliens who harvest the bodies of the young, hippyish, cult-hypnotised Planet People, inducing them to gather at Neolithic monuments (of course) for the purpose (see FT379:43).

THE MYSTERY OF THIS LAND

The message of all this could be “don’t go near the standing stones”, but Folk Horror can also deal with the bewitching and liberating aspects of an encounter with the ancient uncanny. *Penda’s Fen*, commissioned in 1974 from left-wing playwright David Rudkin, used the transcendent beauty of the Malvern Hills, the music of Edward Elgar, the imagery of angels and demons, the last pagan king of Mercia (the Penda of the title) and a series of dream visions and philosophical conversations to deliver a message about fruitful self-knowledge versus the diminution of experience offered by a corporate, class-ridden society. Public school sixth-former Stephen accepts his sexuality and ancestry while questioning the stultifying classical orthodoxy of his education, a process obviously aided by the mystically enfolding landscape. The power of the piece endures – in 2011 it was included in *Time Out* magazine’s 100 best British films, and described as a “multi-layered reading of contemporary society and its personal, social, sexual, psychic and metaphysical fault lines. Fusing Elgar’s ‘Dream of Gerontius’ with a heightened socialism of vibrantly localist empathy,

The occult was fashionable, and this was an all-natural variant



and pagan belief systems with pre-Norman histories and a seriously committed – and prescient – ecological awareness.” [6]

The TV play also posits one of the most powerful ideas throbbing beneath that Folk Horror label:

The Reverend Franklin [Stephen’s father] is the author of an unpublished heretical manuscript ‘The Buried Jesus’, who extols not the plaster Christ of cathedrals but ‘the village god’ – pagan in the true sense, therefore – that

he believes Joan of Arc may have seen as she burned. Speculating that ‘man may revolt from the monolith and come back to the village’, the father’s speech to his son becomes incantatory as, walking in the gloaming with the Malvern Hills behind them, he wonders ‘what mystery of this land, what wisdom’ died with King Penda as he fought his last battle against ‘the new machine’ of the institutionalised church.⁷

Here, Rudkin has definitively nailed the philosophy of the genre: that we have lost something strange and (though potentially terrifying) wonderful. I’m old enough to remember such films first time round, and can recall the sense of reinforcement they brought to feelings that powerful beliefs much older than Christianity were somehow encoded in the national psyche. 1960s hippydom was, after all, only slowly fading, and an ad hoc approach to mystical experience seemed highly attractive, even if it involved no more than a visit to standing stones, earth barrows or even the local antiquities display of a regional museum. The occult was fashionable, and this was an all-natural variant – though of course, you could go further.

June Johns’s romanticised biography of Alex Sanders, *King of the Witches*, had appeared in 1969, publicising a Pagan/Wiccan tradition that, its subject claimed, was not a revival but the active *survival* of pre-Christian practices. He claimed to belong to a line of hereditary witches, but drew strongly from the ideas of Gerald Gardner, to the point of copying the latter’s own *Book of Shadows*, a miscellany of spells of which each original coven would have



its own variation, lovingly passed down the generations. The idea and original example were probably concocted by Gardner in the 1940s. Like Sanders, Gardner helped popularise the seductive notion of witchcraft as a suppressed pagan survival (see FT267:39, 343:56-57), but the concept had been inherited from a more scholarly source.

Sir James Frazer's epic anthropological work of comparative religion, *The Golden Bough* (appearing in various editions and volumes between 1890 and 1915) had drawn on a huge historical and geographical range of religious beliefs and practices to conclude that beneath them all (including, controversially, Christianity) ran the common thread of the dying and reborn solar god/king whose sacrifice ensured the fertility of the land. Hugely influential as this work proved, its most direct effect on popular culture came in 1921 with the publication of *The Witch-cult in Western Europe* by esteemed archaeologist, folklorist and Frazerian Margaret Murray (1863-1963; see FT364:38-39 and p34-41 this issue). Followed by *The God of the Witches* and (perhaps most tellingly) the article on *Witchcraft* in the 1929 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, this promoted the witch-cult hypothesis, proposing that the witch trials of the Early Modern period were an attempt to suppress the survival of a pre-Christian, pagan religion revolving around the worship of a Horned God of fertility whom the Christian persecutors referred to as the Devil. Though academically discredited, the power of this idea re-surfaces in modern Wiccan practice and informs the Folk Horror notion that in some obscure and perhaps primitive nooks of the countryside there might still continue an unbroken tradition of "the old ways", where seasonal offerings meant more than the local harvest festival.

THE SENSE OF THE PAST

Of course, one doesn't need to believe this thesis in order to enjoy its use in the fictions of Folk Horror. It has also, in conjunction with feminist re-interpretation, helped create a sympathetic view of the witch not just as persecuted victim but also as Shamanic wise-woman and healer. Indeed, sympathy rather than horror characterises the eco-aware aspect of the genre, where ancient monuments and landscapes become sources of power and identity whose preservation is vital to our identity/relationship with the past.

This sense of place/past may come easily in the context of Britain, but the idea has to be re-thought when considering American culture. The Salem witch trials represent an obvious incident of real, historical Folk Horror, but they also highlight a conflict of definition. The trials took place in the Christian – indeed, Puritan – society of (mostly) British settlers in Massachusetts. Their beliefs, and the violent need to suppress anything that looked deviant, had been imported with them and had little to do with a local landscape. Perhaps in the USA Folk Horror needs to be coloured by the culture and religion of Native Americans, which certainly spiritualised the natural world while lacking (pre-colonisation) the threat of any conflicting centralised or written authority. America, though, can claim many variations of haunted terrain, and the native/colonist clash of world views suggests its own definition of "the old ways". The trope of building on an "ancient Indian burial ground" turns up in *The Amityville Horror*, *The Shining* and *Pet Sematary* (not to mention numerous cartoon parodies) while Steven King's *Children of the Corn* offers a violent take on the notions of rural sacrifice/fertility/evil. Perhaps the most distinctive piece of American Folk Horror, however,

LEFT: The spirit of Folk Horror animates recent films such as Ben Wheatley's *A Field in England*.

remains Shirley Jackson's 1948 short story *The Lottery*, a chilling evocation of ancient custom in a contemporary small town, which inspired a barrage of complaints when initially published in *The New Yorker*.

In "lit crit" terms, Folk Horror belongs under the umbrella of hauntology, creating imagined pasts that engender a nostalgia for the futures that never followed. We're still re/creating it, with films such as the psychedelic Civil War drama *A Field in England* and via the enthusiastic output of actor/writer/TV pundit/fan Mark Gatiss. Not just novels but anthologies, studies and websites hone our definition, reclaiming a surprising variety of earlier examples for generic inclusion.

Even before it was named and defined, however, the concept had found a natural home in the pages of *Fortean Times*, where high strangeness with a rustic flavour has been explored, dissected and thoroughly enjoyed for years. Best place to find it remains the Letters page, which abounds with corpse-roads, fairy-led confusion, strange hummings, ancient remnants and time lapses. Folk Horror struck its chord because, even if we've never belonged to a Wiccan coven or tripped over a standing stone, we're susceptible to just the kind of mood and atmosphere that lie at its core.

NOTES

- 1 In his 2010 BBC documentary series *A History of Horror*, Mark Gatiss grouped together *Witchfinder General*, *The Blood on Satan's Claw* and *The Wicker Man* as the prime examples of the Folk Horror sub-genre. The BFI website refers to them as the 'Unholy Trinity'.
- 2 The compendious website at <https://folkhorrorrevival.com/> includes a link to the extremely helpful article *From the Forests, Fields and Furrows* by FT regular Andy Paciorek; see also his piece in FT349:55.
- 3 <http://mjsimpson-films.blogspot.com/2013/11/interview-piers-haggard.html>
- 4 In 1968, Hammer was awarded the Queen's Award to Industry in recognition of their contribution to the British economy.
- 5 In 2018 MR James authority Rosemary Pardoe edited *A Ghosts and Scholars Book of Folk Horror*, an anthology of recent stories in which the Jamesian mode was combined with a Folk Horror aesthetic.
- 6 www.timeout.com/london/film/100-best-british-films
- 7 www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/features/quest-romantic-tradition-british-film-pendas-fen

◆ GAIL-NINA ANDERSON has lectured on the history of art at the universities of Newcastle, Northumbria, Nottingham and Sunderland, and the OU. She runs independent courses on art history, film and literature for adults Newcastle. A collection of her ghost stories is planned for 2020.

BLOODY VALENTINE

On 14 February 1945, Charles Walton was found pinned to the frozen slopes of Meon Hill by a pitchfork, his throat slashed. **CATHI UNSWORTH** re-opens the file on the unsolved Lower Quinton murder, whose echoes of witchcraft and ritual sacrifice still haunt the area today





Valentine's Day 1945 is not a date that will be forgotten in Lower Quinton, Warwickshire. Not for any declarations of love made during the sixth long year of World War II in this ancient Cotswolds village – but for the murder of an elderly resident, in a manner so shocking that its echoes still reverberate. Charles Walton, 74, a hedger-and-ditcher who had lived his whole life within this small community, was found lying at the scene of his last job, slaughtered with the tools of his trade. His throat had been carved open with his fearsome-looking slash hook and his body pinned to the ground by his two-pronged pitchfork, which had been rammed around his neck with such force it would require the efforts of two constables to prise it from the frozen ground. He had also been hit on the back of the head with a walking stick he had carved himself to help ease his arthritic joints.

To make this scenario more disturbing, his body was discovered by his 33-year-old niece, Edith Isabel Walton, known as Edie. She had returned home from a day's war work as a printer's assembler to find the home she shared with her uncle, a thatched, half-beamed cottage opposite the Norman church of St Swithins at 15 Lower Quinton, unaccountably empty. Despite, or maybe because of, the close-knit nature of this rural enclave, no one was ever prosecuted and the case remains the oldest unsolved murder on Warwickshire Police's books.

ON MEON HILL

Charles Walton had been working for the previous nine months for Alfred Potter, who managed The Firs farm for his father, Levi. ¹ On the day of his death, Walton was trimming the hedge in a field called the Hillground, on the lower slopes of Meon Hill, an Iron Age hill fort that looms above Lower Quinton. ² It was his custom to leave the house at 9am and be home by 4pm – at that time of year, the best hours of daylight. When Edie returned at 6pm, she didn't think her uncle might have stopped off at the local pub, The College Arms, to quench his thirst after a hard day's graft. Walton, born 12 May 1870, was not really given to socialising.

Edie had lived with Charles and his late wife Isabella since she was three. Her father was Isabella's brother, but although he was still alive, residing in nearby Stratford-upon-Avon, the couple brought their niece up as their own. For the past 18 years, it had been just the two of them, Isabella Walton having passed away on 9 December 1927. Charles paid the weekly 3 shillings rent, bought all their coal and meat and gave Edith £1 a week for housekeeping. He received 10 shillings a week old-age pension. ³ Despite his age and failing health, retirement was not an option. Walton, who had worked on the land since he was a child himself, loved to be outside, preferring the company of animals and birds to humans.

Worried he might have had an accident, Edie went next door to their neighbour, Harry Beasley, another agricultural worker employed by The Firs. Torches in hand, together they set off up the hill from the village to the farm.

IN A LONELY PLACE

Alfred Potter, then 40, had lived at The Firs with his wife, Lillian Elizabeth, for the past five years. He told Edie that he had seen her uncle working on The Hillground at noon, as he passed on his way to milk

TOP: Charles Walton. **LEFT:** The crime scene and murder weapons, photographed in February 1991.



Meanwhile, a CID team led by Detective Superintendent Alec Spooner had been called from Stratford-upon-Avon. PC Lomansey managed to keep Potter with him until they arrived at 11pm, whereupon a statement was taken. Potter repeated what he had told Edie: that he had last seen Walton working on the hedge at noon, prior to which he had been in The College Arms with another local farmer, Joseph Stanley. He had estimated Walton had about another six-to-10 yards of hedge to cut, which he thought would have taken him half an hour; the body was lying four yards on from the spot where Potter had seen him. The farmer described his employee as an “inoffensive man, but one who would speak his mind if necessary.”⁴

The Pathologist, Professor James M Webster of the West Midlands Forensic Laboratory, was the last to arrive at 11.30pm. No stranger to bizarre killings in lonely places, Prof Webster removed the body at 1.30am to make a full post mortem at his Birmingham lab.

BODIES OF EVIDENCE

Prof Webster’s report indicates that the old man hadn’t gone down easily. Walton had been attacked from behind with his walking stick – found three-and-a half yards away from the body, with blood and hair adhering to it – which had an oval dome at the end, something that would have fitted comfortably into his palm. It also made an excellent cudgel. Struck, Walton had dropped his hook and tried to cover his head – there were defensive wounds, lacerations and bruises, on his hands and forearms – while his assailant grabbed the abandoned implement and attacked. Overpowered, Walton fell onto his back, where his opponent straddled him – two ribs were broken in the struggle – and slashed

his cows. He led the way back across the fields to where this last sighting was made.

Charles had not made very much more progress: he had been felled where he worked. Upon seeing his body, Edie broke down. Harry Beasley did his best to console her and keep her from getting too close to the corpse. By chance, his task was made easier by the arrival of another Firs farmhand, Harry Peachey, who was walking past the hedge on the other side. Taking the initiative, Beasley called on Peachey to go and fetch the police so that he could take Edie home.

Potter was left to stand guard over the body for 20 minutes, until the first officer, PC Michael James Lomasney, arrived at 7.05pm. He found the farmer in a state of agitation: shivering, continually looking over his shoulder and complaining about the cold, something that struck the young bobby as out of character for a man used to working in all weathers. Despite the seriousness of the crime, Potter kept asking if he could go home.



TOP: Detective Superintendent Alec Spooner (in hat) investigates. **ABOVE:** The murder scene on Meon Hill, with Charles Walton’s body and the murder weapons clearly visible.



GRAHAM TONEY / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: The row of thatched cottages in Lower Quinton where Charles Walton once lived. **BELOW:** Chief Inspector Robert Fabian of Scotland Yard.

at the throat with the concave edge of the blade, severing the trachea. Clothing on the body was loosened – his shirt untucked and his fly undone – before Walton was pinioned with his pitchfork. The time of death was estimated at between 1 and 2pm. ⁵

Nearly two years previously, Prof Webster had been present at the scene of another disturbing and as yet unsolved wartime murder when, on 19 April 1943, he retrieved the remains of a woman from a tree in Hagley Woods, near Stourbridge in the West Midlands. The mystery of ‘Bella in the Wych Elm’ (see FT364:34-41) has since been linked to the death of Charles Walton in other ways besides the closeness in geography and the attendance of Prof Webster at both scenes – not the least in what his post mortems in both cases *actually* stated and what has gone on to become accepted fact.

By 15 February, Stratford CID needed outside help. The Deputy Chief Constable of Warwickshire sent the following request:

The Chief Constable has asked me to get Scotland Yard to assist in a brutal case of murder that took place yesterday. The deceased is a man named CHARLES WALTON, age 75, and he was killed with an instrument known as a slash hook. The murder was either committed by a madman or one of the Italian prisoners who are in a camp nearby... A metal watch is missing from the body. It is being circulated.

In response, the Metropolitan Police sent their finest: Fabian of the Yard.

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

Chief Inspector Robert Honey Fabian (1901-1974; see FT306:31) and his partner, Detective Sergeant Albert Webb, arrived in Lower Quinton on 16 February. Although

Thatched roofs and locals who “speak of witches with a wry grin”



he had yet to reach the heights of fame he would achieve in the 1950s, when he hosted a BBC television show based on his exploits and wrote two best-selling volumes of his memoirs, ⁶ Fabian was professionally at the top of his game. An Italian-speaking officer, Detective Sergeant Saunders, was also

dispatched from Special Branch to make enquiries of Italian interns being held at the nearby Long Marston Prisoner of War (POW) Camp. ⁷

Chief among DS Spooner’s suspects was Alfred Potter. PC Lomansey had alerted him to what he regarded as the farmer’s suspicious behaviour on the night of the murder, and, as the local officer who knew him best, had been sent to keep a regular eye on goings-on at The Firs.

The watch referred to by the DCC was identified as missing from the deceased’s belongings by Edie Walton. Although described in the internal memo as “Gents plain white metal pocket watch, snap case at back, white enamel face, with ‘Edgar Jones, Stratford on Avon’ thereon. Second hand. English numerals. Valued at 25/- about 10 years ago”, ⁸ this seemingly unassuming object would take on a deep significance.

Fabian wrote that his first impressions of Lower Quinton were of “thatched roofs golden among the Cotswold hills” and locals who “speak of witches with a wry grin... many people will not pass from Bidford down Hillborough-lane for fear of a headless horseman and a ghostly woman in white.” ⁹ He would soon be learning more about the local customs – and talk of witches would cease to seem so amusing.

THE ITALIAN JOB?

An incident room was set up at Stratford CID. Fabian’s first initiative was to arrange a thorough search of Meon Hill, calling in the assistance of Royal Engineers with mine detectors in the hope that finding the missing watch would yield vital evidence. He had an aircraft from nearby RAF



ABOVE: The Red Lion in Long Compton, where the inquest into the 1875 murder of Ann Tennant, accused by her killer of being a witch, was held. **BELOW:** The story featured in a book given to Inspector Fabian.

It transpired that the man was a poacher who regularly managed to wander off from the camp to catch a few rabbits. He was returned without charge. As with the other inmates questioned by DS Saunders, the POW angle did not provide any fruitful leads. Most of those at Long Marston were not criminals, simply Italians interned due to their nationality at the start of the War. Neither did Fabian take the suggestion of a random foreign perpetrator seriously. Whoever had slain Walton with such vehemence, he reasoned, had issues that lay much closer to home.

HELLHOUND ON MY TRAIL

In order to help him learn more about his victim, DS Spooner provided Fabian with some local colour in the form of a book, *Folklore, Old Customs and Superstitions in Shakespeare Land*, written in 1929 by the Rector of Whitchurch, James Harvey Bloom. As well as alluding to such local legends as the ghost of Hillborough Lane and the Woman in White, this volume contained two stories that would weave a spell of witchery over Walton's fate.

The first was of an account of an earlier, similarly grisly murder of an 80-year-old woman in the nearby village of Long Compton in 1875. Ann (or Anne) Tennant was attacked with a pitchfork by a man called James Heywood (or John Haywood in some accounts) who accused her of being a witch, part of a coven of 16 (see FT359:38-43). Haywood's confession was recorded in the 1906 book *Warwickshire* by Clive Holland:

*It came out in evidence that this man for years had honestly believed that when cattle or other animals died, or any evil fortune befell his fellow-villagers, such things were the direct result of the 'Evil Eye' of some unfortunate old women he asserted were "proper old witches"... His mode of killing the unfortunate woman he attacked was evidently a survival of the ancient Anglo-Saxon custom of dealing with such persons by means of 'stacung', or sticking spikes into them; whilst at the same time wishing that the portion of the body so wounded might mortify or wither away.*¹³

Heywood was found not guilty on the grounds of insanity and committed to Broadmoor, where he died in 1890, at the age of 59.¹⁴ It is not just the pitchfork that pierces both narratives, but the subsequent assertion that Ann Tennant was Charles Walton's great-grandmother. This seems to have stemmed from a *Daily Mirror* article from 13 February 1954, the ninth anniversary of Walton's murder, in which the cases were compared and the reporter suggested that police had found a further connection. Since then, Walton's missing watch has morphed into an heirloom from his grandma that contained a small coloured lens or scrying mirror that allowed him to see into the future.¹⁵

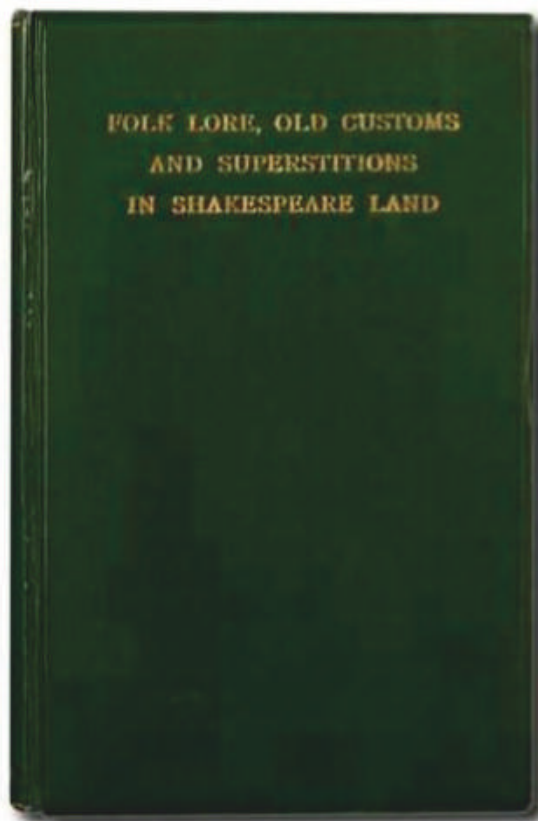
Further enhancing these supernatural

Leamington Spa take aerial photographs to closely map his territory. While statements from the nearly 500 residents of Lower Quinton were taken, he turned his attentions to Spooner's chief suspect.

On 17 February, DS Webb was sent to get a second interview from Albert Potter. This time, the farmer's story altered. Firstly, he said it was 12.20 when he last saw Walton, working on the hedge in his shirtsleeves. He didn't stop to pass the time of day, as he had been told that one of his heifers had got stuck in a ditch. He arrived home at 12.40, then went back out to attend to the animal, which had drowned.¹⁰

As well as the difference in time from his original statement, Potter had not spoken of the heifer before, nor made mention of Walton having taken his jacket off to work; he must have put it back on before he was murdered, as his corpse was wearing it. Picking up on these discrepancies, Fabian sent PC Lomansey back to let Potter know that Scotland Yard detectives were hoping to lift fingerprints off the murder weapons. In fact, the hook and pitchfork yielded no clues, which is why the search for the watch was so intensive – but Fabian wanted to see what reaction this would provoke.

Potter's first response was to tell Lomansey that he *had* touched the murder weapons – but only when, on discovering the corpse, Harry Beasley had insisted that he "make sure that he is gone". Beasley would dispute this fresh claim, stating that Potter knew Walton was dead from the moment he saw the body. Mrs Potter didn't like this turn of events either, angrily opining that the



police were bound to suspect him if his dabs were on the murder weapons. But Potter retorted that the murder must have been the work of "a fascist from the camp".¹¹

He was to receive back-up on his theory when a serviceman turned up at the farm during Lomansey's visit to let them know that an Italian inmate from Long Marston had been detained by Military Police. Lomansey reported that, on hearing this, "Potter affected great glee and his wife became almost hysterical with delight."¹²

The POW had been found hiding in a ditch on Meon Hill with blood on his hands.



GEORGE ARCHER / MIRRORPIX / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Detective Chief Inspector Marshall Smith of Warwickshire Police pictured in 1995 with the pitchfork and slash hook used to kill Charles Walton.

connections, the Rev Bloom's book tells a story from 1885 concerning a young ploughboy who for nine nights in succession saw a phantom black dog on his way home from work on Meon Hill. On the last occasion, the hellhound was accompanied by a headless woman in rustling silks. Arriving home, the lad was told that his sister had just died. His name was Charles Walton.

Was this the same person as the murdered agricultural labourer, at the age of 15? It has never been definitively proved – but Fabian himself stoked the legend of the black dogs on Meon Hill. In his later account, he spent one evening walking on its slopes when, “a black dog came running down Meon Hill, and a moment later a farm lad followed.

‘Looking for that dog, son?’ I said.

He went pale. ‘Dog, mister?’

‘A black dog.’ But without further word he stumbled off in his heavy earth-clogged farm boots.” ¹⁶

At the time, Fabian's investigation was more prosaic. Rather than looking for witches or demon dogs, he had a third go at Alfred Potter, conducting the next interview on 23 February himself.

A CUNNING MAN

Part of Potter's story was verified. Joseph Stanley of White Cross farm confirmed that

Walton's missing watch has since morphed into a scrying mirror

Potter assisted him with the castration of two calves on the morning of 14 February. Afterwards, they visited the College Arms, where Potter drank two glasses of Guinness between 11.45 and noon. But the heifer that fell into the ditch drowned on 13 February and was removed from The Firs at 3.30pm the next day, almost three hours after Potter had claimed to have gone to find it. ¹⁷

Perhaps unsurprisingly, he had a different story to tell the Chief Inspector. This time, Potter walked from the pub on 14 February, passing the jacketless Walton at work before he reached home. There, he stopped to read the paper before going to help one of his workers, Charles Henry ‘Happy’ Batchelor, to pulp some mangolds for feed. When they finished, the church clock showed it was 1pm. This was confirmed by Mrs Potter, who said Potter went to help Batchelor at 12.40pm

and returned at 1.05pm – keeping him with witnesses at the time of the murder. Batchelor later confirmed that Potter came to help him at 12.40pm.

Fabian was not convinced. “Potter is undoubtedly lying about his actions at this critical time but the reason for these lies can, for the present, only be a matter for conjecture,” he stated in his report. ¹⁸

He began to probe finances – Potter's and Walton's. Both seemed to be in straits. After his wife's death, Walton deposited just over £227 in the Midland Bank, but by 1939 this had dwindled to just over £11. But his numerous withdrawals had never been for more than £10 at a time and Edie told Fabian she had never heard her uncle say he owed money, nor seen any IOUs. While it was ascertained that neither Potter nor his father's company had outstanding debts, he was in fact charging more money than he paid out to employees to the farm's accounts and then pocketing the difference. Two former employees, William George Dyde and George Purnell, told police that Potter had difficulties paying them. ¹⁹

But Fabian could not make anything stick to the farmer, whom he found to be – despite appearing “unkempt and on the surface dull-witted” – “an extremely cunning individual”. He didn't have any other major suspects, although he did consider the possibility that Walton's best

BLOOD ON SATAN'S CLAW: THE AFTERLIFE OF CHARLES WALTON

"The natives of Upper and Lower Quinton and the surrounding district are of a secretive disposition and they do not take easily to strangers," wrote Inspector Fabian in his police report in 1945. Five years later, in *Fabian of the Yard*, his account was more elaborate: "When Albert Webb and I walked into the village pub... silence fell like a physical blow. Cottage doors were shut in our faces, and even the most innocent witnesses seemed unable to meet our eyes."

At the core of the Walton case is the very British notion of sophisticated 'townies' trying to impose their ways on the sly 'country folk', who always look after their own. Perhaps this is why Fabian embellished his subsequent retellings of the tale, obfuscating his failure by cloaking it in the superstitions of the backwoods community that thwarted him. He certainly nurtured a bee in his bonnet about Black Magic. By the time of *London After Dark* he was investigating covens in Bayswater (see **FT316:31**) and in his final work, *Anatomy of a Crime*, he looked back on the Walton case to admonish "anybody who is tempted at any time to venture into Black Magic, witchcraft, Shamanism – call it what you will – to remember Charles Walton and to think of his death, which was clearly the ghastly climax of a pagan rite".

As time separated the murder still further from the Britain it was committed in, so the witchcraft elements missed by the original investigation multiplied in the minds of subsequent commentators. Walton was accused of having "blasted" the land, causing the failure of the 1944 harvest by harnessing natterjack toads to tiny ploughs and driving them across the fields. A persistent claim is that a cross was carved in either the chest or neck of his dead body, signifying that his witchcraft had been turned against him. The date of the murder has been used to support this theory: 14 February was Candlemas under the old Julian calendar, but also



LEFT: Margaret Murray. Donald McCormick claimed she had made the witchcraft connection in the Lower Quinton and Hagley Wood murders.

folklorist Professor Margaret Murray who first made both these connections.¹

No serious scholar of Murray or of witchcraft in this country has ever been able to find any documentation to support this claim, which was made five years after her death. Perhaps its close resemblance to the plot of a 1970s folk horror movie can be traced back to the release of McCormick's book in 1968, at the birth of what has been called the 'Haunted Generation', when every town had its own coven and the skies teemed with UFOs.

That said, when BBC Coventry and Warwickshire sent a journalist to take a fresh look at the story in 2014, 'Fay' as she is simply referred to in the archived page,² found a Lower Quinton not so very different from the one in Fabian's memoirs. One by one, residents stonewalled her queries about Walton in what appeared to her to be a well-rehearsed and coordinated response – perhaps best put by the postmistress of 33 years standing, Joyce:

"No one will talk to you about it. There are none of the Walton family left here now. I have no answers to your questions." Suitably chastened, Fay walked out of the village towards Meon Hill with the intention of finding the murder site, but admitted: "I'm afraid I lost my nerve

and turned back." She advised anyone tempted to take a similar trip to: "Please tread carefully if you choose to take this path."

No horror writer could have put it any better.

NOTES

1 McCormick's credibility in quoting Margaret Murray's opinions on both cases is demolished here: www.strangehistory.net/2015/10/27/murder-mccormick-murray-and-the-witches/

2 www.bbc.co.uk/coventry/features/weird-warwickshire/1945-witchcraft-murder.shtml

the Celtic festival of Imbolc that marked the beginning of Spring. The weather on this day is supposed to signify the prevailing pattern of the year ahead, so if Walton was genuinely believed to have caused the failure of the previous year's harvest then there would be reason to sacrifice him on this day, and to do it in such a way that his blood would soak into the ground and replenish the soil's fertility.

The problem with this idea is that Prof Webster's post mortem makes no mention of this injury – just as in the case of Bella in the Wych Elm he does not refer to a missing hand, also seized upon as evidence of ritual murder. But the two cases cross over in the notorious tome *Murder By Witchcraft* by Donald McCormick, in which the author claims that it was the celebrated Egyptologist and

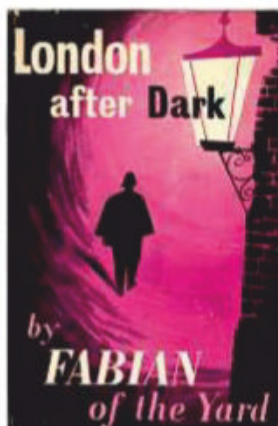




PHOTO CENTRAL / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: Meon Hill, the site of Charles Walton's murder, today. Locals still recall the crime, but the residents of Lower Quinton prefer not to discuss the subject.

friend, 72-year-old George Higgins, might have had something to do with it. Edie told him that the pair had not seen each other since Christmas, perhaps indicative of a falling out, and, at the time of the murder, Higgins was renovating a barn only 300 yards away. But Fabian concluded that the pensioner had neither the strength nor the motive. ²⁰

After Fabian and Webb returned to London empty-handed, new information came to light. The PC who had relieved Michael Lomasney on the night of the murder reported that Potter had returned to the Hillground soon after dawn on 15 February. Though warned off the murder site, the farmer had lingered to talk about the weather and smoke a cigarette before leaving.

This revelation brought Fabian back for yet another interview. Since he had left the village, 'Happy' Batchelor and another employee of The Firs had resigned; in the former's case, possibly because he feared he had compromised himself by giving Potter an alibi. But however suspicious all this appeared, it did not advance the case. ²¹

Walton's killer – or killers – had dissolved into the February fog, to be replaced by still more diaphanous phantoms, folk tales and myths. His shade seems doomed to walk Meon Hill for eternity, a black dog padding at his heels.

NOTES AND SOURCES

1 Metropolitan Police File MEPO3/2290

2 At an elevation of 636ft (194m) on the flat top of a hill conspicuous for miles around. Originally the hill was encircled by a double line of defences, the best preserved of which now lie on the southwest and southeast side. www.ourwarwickshire.org.uk/content/catalogue_her/iron-age-hillfort-at-meon-hill

3 Edith Walton in her statement, Metropolitan Police File MEPO3/2290.

4 Alfred Potter in his statement, *ibid*.

5 *Ibid*.

6 The TV show was entitled *Fabian of the Yard*, named after his 1950 memoir, and ran from November 1954 to February 1956, the first ever TV police procedural series. Fabian's second memoir, *London After Dark*, was published in 1954 and the final volume, *Anatomy of a Crime*, in 1970.

7 Metropolitan Police File MEPO3/2290.

8 *Ibid*

9 Robert Fabian *Fabian of the Yard*, Naldrett Press, 1950.

10 Metropolitan Police File MEPO3/2290.

11 *Ibid*.

12 *Ibid*.

13 *Warwickshire Painted By Fredrick Whitehead Described By Clive Holland* (A and C Black, 1906). In his fascinating overview of the Walton case, Devin McKinney notes that in the later reprint of this book, the passage on the Evil Eye killing was removed. See <http://thefaceatthewindow>.

blogspot.com/2006/02/black-dogs-on-meon-hill.html.

14 *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*.

15 In his 1995 overview of the case's 50th anniversary, Adrian Pengelly says that the watch was retrieved from an outhouse behind Walton's cottage in 1960 by a workman, who opened the case to find a small piece of coloured glass inside. "Walton was known to have carried this around with him, never letting it out of his possession," Pengelly writes. "The general consensus of opinion amongst the villagers was that this was a piece of witch glass... The odd thing about this find was that the police had searched the building shortly after the crime and found nothing, so it appears that the killer must have returned at some point later to deposit the watch." He gives no sources for this story. See: www.whitedragon.org.uk/articles/charles.htm

16 Fabian, *op. cit*.

17 Metropolitan Police File MEPO3/2290.

18 *Ibid*.

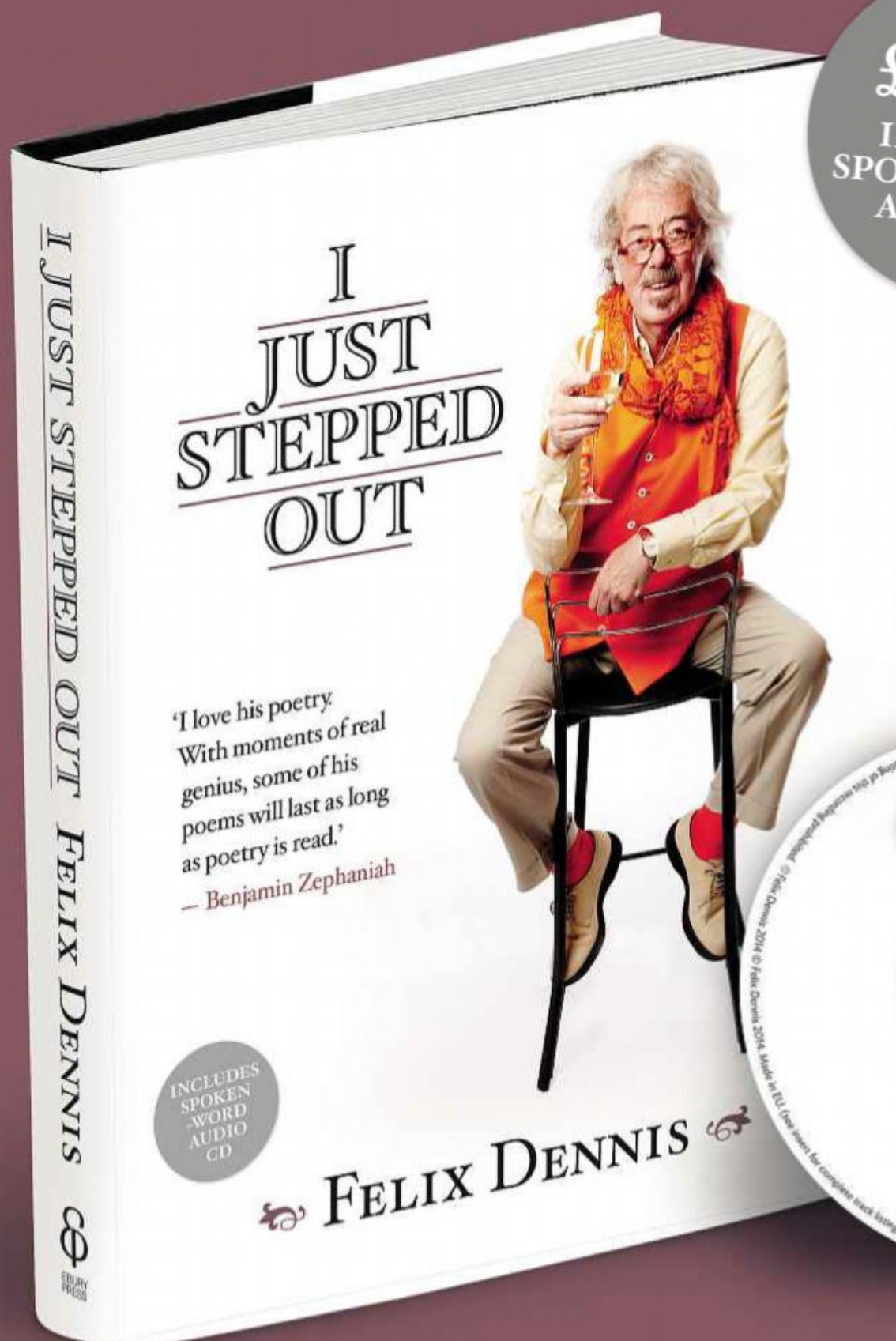
19 *Ibid*.

20 *Ibid*.

21 *Ibid*.

◆ **CATHI UNSWORTH** is a crime writer. Her most recent novel is *That Old Black Magic* (*Serpent's Tail*, 2018), and her fictional take on the Walton murder, "Black Dog", is published as part of the *Invisible Blood* short story compendium, edited by Maxim Jakubowski and published by Titan Books on 23 July.

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Alien sex on the brain

RICHARD GEORGE asks if our libidinous temporal lobes might link various sexy fortean phenomena.

A young couple, very much in love, sprawled together in the back seat of an old jalopy on a deserted dirt road in the isolated back hills east of Ravenswood, West Virginia...

It could only be John Keel. But look at what comes next.

"The phenomenon has an almost pornographic preoccupation with our mating practices."¹

Cue Antonio Vilas-Boas and his animalistically grunting spacewoman.

Albert Budden, whom I've been reading a lot recently, strikes me as one of the most important UFO writers since Keel. Highly scientifically literate, he develops the ideas of Michael Persinger (temporal lobes) and Paul Devereux (earth lights). I Googled "Michael Persinger sex", and what did I find first? "Watch Michael Persinger gay porn videos here for free"! This is another Michael Persinger (at least, I assume it is). But on a more serious note, I also came across, in an article by AE Walker, the phrase "the libidinous temporal lobe".²

So in theory all we need is one of these earth lights, lightning balls, whatever, to descend upon Vilas-Boas in Brazil, and his tractor itself becomes a UFO, via confabulation, and his inflamed temporal lobes stage a vivid sexual scenario. We don't need his galactic Gisele Bündchen at all. It hurts to let her go.

Comfort yourselves with Jenny Wade's book *Transcendent Sex*. She marshals an impressive range of evidence to illustrate that sexual union itself can be telepathic, hallucinatory, even mystical. She calls this "one of



ABOVE: Antonio Vilas-Boas's "animalistically grunting spacewoman".

the best-kept secrets in human history".³

In fact, though, religions have long exploited it. Temples in Athens and Corinth employed *hierodouloi*, sacred prostitutes,⁴ and for centuries Tantric yoga has channelled coition to visionary ends. Then there is Aleister Crowley. He, undaunted by lack of evidence, conjured a past life as Astarte, a holy whore in Agrigentum, Sicily.⁵

According to one pundit, staring intimately into a lover's eyes for 10 minutes can cause hallucinations.⁶ Henry Miller did a great deal more than that, and captures this elusive phantasmagoria like few other writers:

*I lay like a dolphin on the oyster-banks. A slight twitch and I'd be in the Pullman reading a newspaper or else up an impasse where there were mossy round cobblestones and little wicker gates which opened and shut automatically... In the immense black grotto there was a silk-and-soap organ playing a predaceous black music. When she pitched herself high, when she turned the juice on full, it made a violaceous purple, a deep mulberry stain like twilight...*⁷

Very little study has been conducted into this distinct state of consciousness: William Burroughs deplored the "miasma of idiotic prurience and anxiety that blocks any scientific investigation of sexual phenomena".⁸

Returning to Persinger (the psychologist, that is), it is important to notice that endorphins, the brain's own drugs, reduce the threshold for seizures of the temporal lobe, and that endorphins are released during sexual intercourse. Temporal lobe seizures can cause the whole gamut of experiences like Jenny Wade's, including "disturbances of vision, distortions of colour, size or time and even illusions or fully formed hallucinations".⁹ Note especially "distortions of size or time".

So sex itself can place us in Persinger's confabulatory world, where the Cosmic Joker pulls Susan Blackmore's leg. Keel's TNT area was a magnet for "love cars";¹⁰ Jonathan Downes observes: "There were large amounts of sex hormones... floating around Mawnan Woods..."¹¹ When sex is interrupted, does something occur like hypnopompia?

Congratulations, before I go, to a young radio ham called Bob Renaud, who in 1961 contacted Lin-Erri from the planet Korendor. She told him how to rebuild a boob tube to see her, revealing an intergalactic blonde bombshell of the first magnitude.¹² Vilas-Boas, eat your heart out! The Bonzo Dog Band nailed all this in a 1968 parody called *Beautiful Zelda*. I'm intrigued by the name 'Korendor': it echoes the Greek verb *korennymi*, "to satiate", a word with sexual connotations. We're back with Keel's cartoon Classics.¹³ Venus is not just a planet: she is also a goddess of love. From Aphrodite to Astarte, and then to Ashtar, is a short step.

NOTES

¹ John A Keel, *The Mothman Prophecies*, 1975, p103f. Janet and Colin Bord describe a similar case near Veedersburg, Indiana, in February 1981, where a couple amorously entangled in a car reported seeing Bigfoot. *Modern Mysteries of the World*, 1989, p33.

² AE Walker, in *Schweizer Archiv für Neurologie, Neurochirurgie und Psychiatrie*, 111(2), 1972, pp473-84.

³ Jenny Wade, *Transcendent Sex*, p.2 and *passim*.

⁴ See JP Sullivan in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 1970, p512.

⁵ Lawrence Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt: A Life of Aleister Crowley*, 2000, p238.

⁶ www.wackoworldofyogibhajan.net/forums/viewtopic.php?t=747.

⁷ Henry Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn*, 1939, p165f.

⁸ William Burroughs, *The Ticket that Exploded*, 1968 edition, p54 (footnote).

⁹ Susan Blackmore, *Dying to Live*, 1993, p205f.

¹⁰ John A Keel, *op. cit.*, p59.

¹¹ Jonathan Downes, *The Owlman and Others*, 1998, p73f.

¹² Janet and Colin Bord, *Life Beyond Planet Earth?*, 1992, p124f. Compare Romy Schneider supposedly Skyping Claus Schreiber via ITC.

¹⁴ See my piece in **FT356.55**.

♦♦ RICHARD GEORGE is a cryptid classicist. He was last spotted in Cambridge about 20 years ago.

The Dream Quest of Steve Moore

BOB RICKARD celebrates the rich dream life and literary legacy of his old friend, Steve Moore.

Last issue's Moon- and Selene-related stories set up a poignant banquet that deserved a guest of honour. Sadly, Steve Moore, who died on the afternoon of 14 March 2014, could not attend, but he is very much with us in spirit. Let me tell you why.

I had known Steve since 1967. That was when he, the comic writer-artists Steve Parkhouse and Barry Windsor Smith and I, began corresponding after they saw a fan-letter of mine in a Marvel comic (*Daredevil* no 25, Feb 1967; see **FT372:2**). At that time, they all lived in London while I was a product design student in Birmingham. Our letters were wild, surrealistic and inventive – for example, I tried typing mine on the *inside* of envelopes. Eventually, Steve P and Barry went off to the USA to work on Marvel's *Daredevil* and *Nick Fury: Agent of SHIELD*, while Steve M developed his master-disciple relationship with a young Alan Moore (no relation). As I kept very busy with the early *FT*, Steve regularly visited me in Birmingham. Throughout nearly five decades, by phone and letter (no Internet in those days) he was *FT*'s attentive midwife; but best of all he was the best kind of friend and colleague I could have ever hoped for. It was not until after his death (see my obit, **FT314:24-26**) that I realised he was so much more than that.

Steve was one of those divinely favoured creatures, an autodidact, with no university degree and no tutoring by academics, just his voluminous correspondence with those he regarded as friends, colleagues and fellow travellers. He was modest about his accomplishments. Those who know him only as a writer of comic strips may be surprised



ABOVE: Steve in his book-lined bedroom – “an analogue of Endymion’s cave, a sacred place...”

to hear that he devoted years to mastering Greek and Roman mythology, the literature of the late-19th century Decadent movement, Elizabethan culture, and a variety of systems of magic both ancient and modern.

To this he added a profound knowledge of the *I Ching* and Daoism. He tutored himself in written Mandarin, and became an expert on interpreting the *I Ching* (*Yi Jing*); eventually editing a specialist periodical and contributing to a well-received annotated bibliography.

He built up an extensive collection of Chinese movies (matched only by his brother Chris's Japanese movie library), and could recall the plots and actors from most of them. With Alan Moore he raised the bar on comic and graphic novel writing. With me, he'd discuss the work of Charles Fort and helped the evolution of the *Fortean Times*, not forgetting his many valuable contributions to it, including the Herculean drudgery of compiling indexes to its first 117 issues.

With Mike Crowley, he

He awoke to a voice whispering in his ear: “Endymion”

explored the mysteries of *soma* (an elixir which bestowed immortality upon the Hindu gods); and pursued China's mysterious Queen Mother of the West, *Xi Wangmu* – a shamanic figure possibly older, even, than the Greek deities – on her journey from the mists of antiquity into Daoist legend (she is credited in places as the original author of the *Dao De Jing*).

What is relevant to us here is that *Xi Wangmu*, a primordial immortal female, is also said to have had an intimate relationship with a number of China's early historical emperors and kings. She would visit them in dreams and is even said to have materialised or incarnated as

their consort. Steve found other such relationships – between a divine lover-tutor and a mortal man – in his reading of Græco-Roman mythology, but the one that struck him most was that between the Moon goddess Selene and the shepherd Endymion.

As Alan Moore relates, in his ‘Afterword’ to Steve's last great work, *Selene* (published a couple of months ago by Strange Attractor Press), 1976 figures as the year Steve began his serious endeavours. Steve told Alan that it was his spontaneous purchase of a Chinese magical ‘coin sword’ around this time that triggered events. As the weighty shadow of his future loomed before him, he had performed a simple ritual, pointing the sword to the cardinal directions and asking the Fates for some guidance. That night his sleep was dreamless, but in the hypnopompic dawn, he awoke to a voice whispering in his ear: “Endymion”. From then on, the Moon Goddess became an increasingly important part of his life.



Towards the end of his life Steve appointed Alan Moore and me as his executors. I had long known Steve kept a dream diary, but it was only when I began packing up his library – three metric tons of it (mainly books) – that the extent to which he did this *religiously* became clear. His regular dream record, made over decades and running into many volumes, is now in Alan’s care. It is a unique resource and deserves its own study. Steve had developed a remarkable level of recall and control over his dreams; once confirming to me that he was able, at times, to become conscious within them and direct them to some degree. We had been talking about his attempts to ‘travel’ in a dream – what used to be called ‘astral projection’ – but in retrospect I realise that he was more interested in the creative potential of dreaming, both as inspiration for his story-telling, and – of greater importance to him – as a medium in which he could communicate intimately with his Goddess.

It was only when I read Peter Kingsley’s *In the Dark Places of Wisdom* (1999) that I realised the full importance of this Goddess invocation. Briefly, Kingsley reconstructs the legacy of the Pythagorean philosopher Parmenides, who flourished in southern Greece around the sixth century BC. The Pythagoreans valued quiet and solitude highly, and many of their hero-shrines had within their precinct a quiet place (often a cave under the shrine or on a nearby mountain), where, after appropriate rituals the ‘temple sleep’ began. Supplicants slept in the hope of receiving in their dreams divine guidance or healing (see FT178:30-35, 291:36-39). As Kingsley shows, this ‘incubation’ was not simply to obtain healing or oracular guidance – those were ordinarily practised widely. Certain people, called wisdom-seekers (*kouros*), used this method specifically for meditation, inspiration and direct intercourse with the gods.

On each of my visits to Steve’s hilltop house – once a family home, then shared with his



ABOVE: *Selene and Endymion*, by Ubaldo Gandolfi (c. 1770).

brother, but in the end a refuge for its sole occupant – the earthly traces of a stellar intellect were plainly evident. His small office and bedroom were lined with sagging shelves, teetering stacks of ring-binders and file folders, each dedicated to some aspect of his research projects. Each stuffed with his Internet and other research, printed out and carefully filed. Uncovering earlier folders behind or beneath those was a kind of literary and philosophical archæology, the inky tracks of where Steve’s curiosity had run far and wide, but always towards his Goddess.

Steve’s book-lined bedroom was the quiet place in which his daily acts of worship were devoted to illuminating the celestial entity in all her aspects. It was an analogue of Endymion’s cave – a sacred place where the boundaries of this and another world blurred; a *temenos* into which he placed his incubatory bed. He had crafted an icon of Selene and kept it close to where he laid his head, gazing at it as he drifted off to sleep and hopeful dreaming.

Steve’s simple hermetic lifestyle (which included a few essential clothes and a regular vegetarian diet) also conformed to the Pythagorean formula. A chief characteristic of the wisdom-mysteries, as the Ancient Greeks knew it, was *kourotrophos*: the *milieu* in which initiates, *kouroi*, were brought into contact with the gods as living entities. Although the modern use of the term *kouros* applies to Greek statuary depicting idealised youths, its more archaic usage, especially among the Pythagoreans, described any aspirant – even to aged philosophers like Parmenides and heroes like Herakles (as he prepared to enter the Underworld) – who quested, or stood before a teacher, or lay down before a divine image, and opened their innermost selves in quiet anticipation. Steve, it is plain to me now, was a *kouros* in spirit and deed.

His last gift to me – his library – is in my basement, alongside some of the equally bulky library of the late Peter Rogerson (see

obit FT366:26). As a researcher into a rare subject – levitation and related phenomena – I could not be more fortunate, having to hand the libraries of two of the greatest fortune minds of my time. Most of the very books I need are literally within my reach. As satisfying as this is, it is of Steve’s presence that I still feel the most loss. I used to pester him for odd things – mentions of ‘magical flying’ from the legends of the Eight Immortals, or what the name was of Hermes’s winged sandals – and he would always come back with exactly what I wanted. Now, as my research wanders further into the territories Steve knew best, causing me, more than ever, to miss his knowledge and guidance, his faint ghost, which is never far away, simply points to my cellar.

Steve’s humble yet gloriously rich example and his unconditional friendship inspired and encouraged me to never feel daunted by the difficulty or exclusivity of a subject, or to worry over the opinion or approval of professional academicians as long as we aim for authentic scholarship – principles we try to apply in FT’s editorial policy. It is there, behind the scenes that Steve’s legacy is very much alive. Follow your hunches; don’t make a fetish of conventions; pay attention to detail; and always include your sources. Don’t forget to have fun.

All this he displays in full measure in *Selene*. As Alan records in the book’s ‘Afterword’: “[O]n that unusually balmy Friday afternoon... Steve had concluded work on his completed manuscript and risen from his chair.” The heart attack was immediate and Steve died precisely at the moment his earthly work was done, flying, I hope, to the waiting arms of his Goddess. Vale *kouros*!

Adapted from Bob Rickard’s foreword to Steve Moore, *Selene: The Moon Goddess & The Cave Oracle*, 2019, Strange Attractor Press, London, 2019.

♦ **BOB RICKARD** started FT in 1973 and was its co-editor for 30 years. He is the author of numerous books and articles on *fortune* and *strange phenomena*.

Edinburgh Forteans at 20

GORDON RUTTER, founder of the Edinburgh Fortean Society, looks back over two decades of fortean fellowship, eclectic events and enforced venue-hopping...

On the night of Friday, 9 April 1999 a small group of people sat around a table in The Claremont Bar in Edinburgh. That night, as we drank, I read from Bob Rickard's introduction to Charles Fort's *Book of the Damned*. Just bits of it; enough to give those who didn't know anything about him an idea of who Fort was, what he did, how he saw the world, and why he might be important. We chatted afterwards, agreed it had been fun and agreed on a plan that we should meet every month and have a talk about a subject drawn from the vast world of forteana.

And that was the first meeting of the Edinburgh Fortean Society.

Obviously, it wasn't due to some mind-boggling fortean coincidence that we had come together around that table; it had, of course, been planned, and everyone gathered there was a friend of mine. We already met in the Claremont on a weekly basis as part of the long running Edinburgh *Doctor Who* group. One night, at one of the *Doctor Who* chats, I asked if anyone would be interested in a group where we talked about forteana. I already knew Stewart Smith would say yes; we had met through the forteana email list and had attended several FT UnConventions together. Fortunately, enough other people said yes to make it seem like a viable proposition. I had a quick chat with the pub owners to see if we could book some space for our new group; yes, of course, no problem – but as it was a group



GORDON RUTTER

ABOVE: Some of the attendees at the Edinburgh Fortean Society's 20th birthday party, which took place in April.

booking, what was the name of the group?

I hadn't thought that far ahead to be honest! So, I reckoned that as we were meeting in Edinburgh and we were a bunch of forteans... we should be the Edinburgh Fortean Society. And so we booked our table. The choice of holding meetings on the second Friday of the month was deliberate – it meant that every so often we would have a meeting which would fall on Friday the 13th – which seemed kind of cool. I stuck up a few posters in the pub, and on the appointed date and time we met. The posters hadn't, it seemed, attracted any new people, so it was those of us from the *Doctor Who* group again. No worries.

For our second meeting we had the whole top floor of the pub and had a slide show from myself and Scott Russell about Rosslyn Chapel and the mysteries associated with it – and this was long before Dan Brown got involved! It was definitely a bit more ambitious than just sitting round a single

Are we currently the UK's oldest extant fortean group?

table chatting.

Eventually, after only four meetings, our first Friday the 13th came around – specifically, Friday, 13 August 1999. Only one possible topic for that meeting – so we had a talk on luck and superstition. But we hadn't thought this one through. This was Edinburgh in August, with the Festival and Fringe in full swing, and despite having a booking for the upstairs room we arrived to find it full of festival-goers. Fortunately, we were still able to have our talk in a beer garden at a local pop-up venue, but we haven't held a talk in August since.

Fridays soon proved to be a problem as well – extremely popular with people wanting to

hold parties and other events. Once, we were kicked out of our booked room and banished to an area under the stairs, with the speaker battling against the noise of drunken revellers. So, we tried different days, and have finally settled on the quiet night (for pubs) of Tuesday. We still keep it to the second Tuesday of the month, for reasons of tradition as much as anything. Another early tradition was that there would be no December talk but instead a Christmas meal, a chance to be sociable. Normal meetings were great, but didn't offer much opportunity to sit down and chat with other people. So, the format is now 10 talks a year, one social event, and one break.

Once the group was up and running, members began to volunteer to do talks. We got mentioned in the local press, we were in fortean email lists and details of our talks were posted on the Fortean Times Message Board. And then one day it happened: someone I had never met before turned up to



one of our meetings! A stranger, prompted to come along by an interest in all things fortean. That was when I knew the group had really taken off.

Since our humble beginnings we have put on over 200 talks – and we’ve also had 14 different venues. Most places welcome us with open arms initially and then after a couple of years at most they seem to lose interest, even though we’re bringing in money on a quiet night. We’ve gotten used to it, and we simply move on.

And we don’t just have talks – we’ve put on all-day events as well. The first one, in 2007, was the imaginatively titled Edinburgh Fortean Society Day Event. In addition, we’ve organised a number of outings, mostly to local places with some fortean connection.

And I’d like to think that we’ve inspired others over the years. There was, briefly, a group in Newcastle, and a slightly longer-lived Dublin group. I shared a few pointers from my own experience with the organisers of both, was even able to pop along to the Dublin group. But there is one group still going strong – the London Fortean Society, which started 10 years ago. So, a happy 10th birthday to them – and well done for putting on such a wide and varied programme.

Initially, EdFort meetings were free, but the decision was eventually taken to start charging: one whole pound. For the attendees, it’s nothing; but it pays the speakers’ expenses and keeps them in drinks for the evening. Any surplus money is stored, and once a year we splash out on visitors from a bit further afield, such as Richard Freeman, Steve Parsons and Ian Simmons. We’ve even had FT founder Bob Rickard, and a certain David Sutton has promised to show up at some point in the future – if his busy schedule allows.

Over the years, we have repeated some topics and some talks have actually taken two meetings to present the whole argument (on one memorable occasion each of a two-part talk took three hours rather than our



GORDON RUTTER

ABOVE: EdFort gets out and about – a cemetery tour in 2015.

normal one hour talk, break and Q and A for up to 45 minutes scenario).

We’ve had a range of subjects but there are still plenty we have not touched on. The website gives a list of all of the talks we have held. Some have been mainstream, aimed at a general audience (for example, a talk on what cryptozoology is), while others have been pretty niche (for example, we had one talk entitled ‘God’s Snowflake’, which was a sort of personal *Bible Code* thing for the speaker, based on a book that had fallen off his shelves when he was walking past!) And, some have been a bit more interactive, including a demonstration of how the skin of the *Hindenburg* could have formed thermite (yes, we had a thermite fire in a pub).

Recently, though, we have been a bit self-indulgent as we celebrated our 20th anniversary – we have had a look back at literally everything we have done over 20 years and we’ve held a party. I was pleasantly surprised when I sat down to plan the programme and noticed the party itself would be on Tuesday 9 April – exactly 20 years to the day since our first meeting. A

nice coincidence, of which I am sure Fort would have approved. The final event planned for our anniversary celebrations is a one-day conference on Saturday 13 July: six speakers for £12.50 in the centre of Edinburgh, followed by drinking in haunted vaults – now, that can’t be bad!

Are we currently the UK’s oldest extant fortean group? There *are* older groups, but they don’t seem to be doing anything at the moment. If you know otherwise, please write in and stake your claim. And if you don’t have a fortean group in your area, why not start one? I’ve certainly enjoyed the past 20 years – and the group even led directly to my meeting the woman who is now my wife. Three people who were at the first meeting are still regular attendees, and there are many regulars who have joined and continue to help move the group forward. We have over 400 members on our Facebook account, nearly 100 on Twitter, and our biggest talks have attracted over 80 participants; so, a big thank you to all of our followers, attendees and speakers.

What’s next for the Edinburgh

Fortean Society? Well, more talks, of course – and no doubt more venues! Day events and outings have proved popular, so more of those as well. I’ve toyed with a podcast and a publication of some type, but they’ve not happened yet. We’ve got a joint event (a trip to Loch Ness) coming up with the Belgian Cryptozoology Club, so we’re going a bit international; and there’s interest in a tour of Rennes le Château and the associated area. So, things look healthy. We’ve got our website, and a presence on Facebook and Twitter.

If you’re ever in Edinburgh on the second Tuesday of the month... well, you’ll find a warm, fortean welcome waiting for you – wherever we happen to be meeting!

Website: <http://edinburghforteansociety.org.uk/>

Facebook: Edinburgh Fortean Society

Twitter: @edinforsoc

Conference: www.gordonrutter.com/edfort-at-20/

◆ GORDON RUTTER is the founder of EdFort. A schoolteacher by day, he is a longtime fortean and regular contributor to FT.

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Conspiracy: American as apple pie?

The author of a rewarding study of conspiracism in the United States, whose current president appears to have normalised it, asks tentatively whether it is corroding American democracy

Conspiracies of Conspiracies

How Delusions Have Overrun America

Thomas Milan Konda

University of Chicago Press 2019

Hb, 442pp, ind, notes, \$30, ISBN 9780226585765

Conspiracy theory is a worldwide phenomenon, but nowhere in the world has its influence been felt, and debated, so much as in the United States. So it's no surprise that the academic study of conspiracy theory (conspiracy theory theory) and the slew of books on the subject, academic and otherwise, are centred in the USA, and focus most often on the phenomenon of conspiracism as it appears in the USA.

Pizzagate, the QAnon phenomenon, 'false flag' responses to mass shootings, the sovereign individual; these are the meat of modern conspiracism in America – these and the fact that the current president arguably came to political prominence on the back of a conspiracy theory (the Obama 'birther' movement) and has continued to allude to conspiratorial themes both in his election campaign and during his tenure. If Trump and his support base have brought conspiracism into the mainstream of American political discourse, they have done so on firm historical foundations; as Thomas Konda argues in his extensive analysis, conspiratorial thinking has been around pretty much since the birth of the Republic, and has often exercised some influence (baleful in the main, he contends) on the political climate.

Conspiracies of Conspiracies charts the history of conspiracism in America, from the reception

of pioneering works such as John Robison's *Proofs of a Conspiracy* (first published in 1797), through the various flowerings of home-grown theory, up to the frenetic, Internet-fuelled activity of today. Konda's survey is perhaps the most comprehensive attempt yet to record and understand the phenomenon of conspiracy theory as it applies to American politics, and the large number of American thinkers and writers who have worked from the now classic assumption that 'they' are out to get 'us'.

While conspiracy theory is not in itself quintessentially American – the first major conspiracist works came from a Scot (Robison; yet another unacknowledged invention from Scotland?) and a French man, Augustin Barruel – Konda, implicitly at least, suggests that there is a quintessentially American version of it. American conspiracism is often religious, and always religiose; it is often paranoid, and always somehow beleaguered; it is regularly racist, and always at least partly xenophobic; it is often supremacist, and always exceptionalist; it is usually partisan, and more often right-wing; in short, it's a peculiar microcosm of American culture.

Is it also a particularly American psychopathy? Konda discusses the psychology of conspiracism (another area of academia that's currently flourishing) and is broadly sympathetic to the view that conspiracism is linked to certain dispositions: schizotypy, paranoia, an over-developed sensitivity to pattern recognition. But he also points out that many of the studies conducted have limitations, and often find it hard to replicate results (occasionally

"Conspiratorial thinking has been around pretty much since the birth of the Republic"

a sign that the original study was flawed, or inherently biased). He is catholic enough in his survey of theoretical work to include those (such as Jack Bratich, Matthew Dentith and Lee Basham, among others) who do not share the view that conspiracy theory is purely the preserve of the mad. Nonetheless, he tends to the view that conspiracy theorists are at the least eccentric, and often a little crazy.

The main strength of the book lies in its historical narrative. Konda takes us from the early suspicions of Illuminati influence on the founding of the Republic, through the growing trend to anti-Semitism among the writers (and supporters) of the 19th century and the emerging distrust of elite bankers, the white supremacist response to the civil rights legislation of the 1960s, constitutionalist conspiracism, the Tea Party storm, to the current climate of false flags, crisis actors, and the wide-ranging apoplexy of the alt-right. Through it all, the common and confounding themes of American conspiracism provide an eccentric entelechy that links the diverse fears and phantoms that haunt the political and emotional landscape; it is as if 'they' continually morph and mutate over time, but the idea of 'us' is a constant.

That idea of 'us' is a partisan construct, of course. The

American Conspirasphere is divided (and not entirely evenly, it appears) between a right-leaning constituency that hates government but loves authority (and yes, there is something inherently fascist about such a viewpoint) and a liberal left that craves regulation but fears the imposition of power from above or beyond (for which read religion and Russia). Konda ruminates, not always comfortably, on whether the contemporary incursion of

conspiracism into the mainstream is, ultimately, corrosive of the democratic process. Despite his best efforts, and the tolerance of his narrative in most respects, he struggles to remain agnostic on this point. One senses that his inner voice says conspiracy theory is bad for the stability of the state, even as his intellectual persona argues that, theoretically at least, dissidence and questioning, even when it is as left-field as Q, is fundamental to democracy, or at least permissible within its bounds.

You won't find a catalogue of mad musings in *Conspiracies of Conspiracies*; it's largely a sober and reflective book (although Konda exercises a sly, dry humour on occasion) on a subject that is increasingly contentious, and increasingly central, in the discourses on American politics, science and medicine in particular. But there is plenty to be discovered here; this is the first book on conspiracy theory I have read in a while that has introduced me to new characters in the history of the phenomenon. For instance, the surprisingly large number of women who



Continued on p60

Not just a cigar

Gods and goddesses from all over the ancient world were the sex pests of their time

Sex in the World of Myth

David Leeming

Reaktion Books 2018
Hb, 239pp, illus, bib, ind, £15.99, ISBN 9781780239774

Hailed in his lifetime as a forerunner and restorer of timepieces – and overlooked today as a great stylist of the English language – Rupert Gould is now revealed as unintentional satirist. In his 1930s and '40s BBC radio tales, *Stargazer Talks*, he referred to the Victoria Embankment's 21m (69ft) penis as “jacked up” and “rolled down”. He was speaking about the transport of Cleopatra's Needle to Westminster. Even at the time, there was little doubt that it was neither Cleopatra's nor a needle. The granite spire was erected (ahem) in ancient Egypt some 14 centuries before Cleopatra was born. We moderns have styled it as an obelisk or stele but, to paraphrase Andy Griffith's 1953 nightclub act, “What it was, was a penis.” Not in those words, but so says David Leeming, author of *Sex in the World of Myth*, a deft and fast-paced tour of religious thought dating to prehistory.

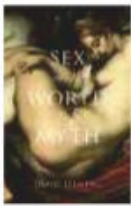
Yes, “there were giants in the earth in those days” and they came eagerly “unto the daughters of men”. And also unto sons of men. And sisters, brothers, fathers and mothers of men; the ‘Oedipus complex’ existed long before Oedipus.

The sculpted figures of ur-woman resemble the young Linsey Dawn McKenzie. But those are easily outdone by a phallus as large as its owner in the earliest known illustration of human coitus, dated 40,000 BC. Or perhaps that's too generous a description; the partner she earnestly clasps is clearly a floppy-eared dog.

Good boy.

Leeming's survey would make Jacques Vallée alternately smile and grimace. There is enough room here for fairy changelings and alien abductions. Indeed, visitors stalking humanity seem part of a universal pattern laid down since prehistory. Except for the failure of modern flying saucer crews to update and further the ancient worldwide legend of vaginas with teeth. You go, girl!

The earliest philosophers seem to have judged the ultimate foundational act to be the creation of Life, the Universe and Everything. But instead of explaining it as



Douglas Adams's ‘42’, they almost uniformly equated cosmic invention with the act of procreation. It was recognised millennia before the microscope that men

had some sort of seed and that women had some sort of, um, wet and fertile pastureland. Something like the Nile in spring. And don't let's go into vulvas and landscaped country mounds in both hemispheres.

Besides Greeks and Romans, the author handles Canaan, India, Celts and Norsemen, China, Japan, Oceania and the aboriginal Americans. Many of the myths are pleasant and pastoral. Still, everywhere are t*ts, c*cks and high drama that make gods and goddesses often seem little better than equal-opportunity rapists.

Freud supposedly said that “Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar”. But Leda and the Swan and the Minotaur, are just – well, tales relating to other kinds of cigars. With masturbation and castration thrown in. And that's just classical history.

This is a highly recommended survey of how throughout time we have imagined the creation of Earth and its life in terms of our own procreation.

Jay Rath

★★★★★

Continued from p59

were influential in conspiracist circles, particularly from the 1930s to the 1950s and beyond, was a revelation. And who knew that the great Ignatius Donnelly had penned a conspiracist novel (*Caesar's Column: A Story of the Twentieth Century*)?

Konda makes references to other countries (most often the UK) but one weakness of the book for me was the lack of a significant comparator; another country or culture against which to measure the depth of conspiracism in the USA. Is the USA unique or merely unusual in the importance that is now given to thinking, positive or negative, about conspiracism? What does conspiracism look like in the countries closest to the USA in terms of political power, Russia and China for instance; and in those countries most removed from that power? Are there countries where conspiracy theory has played a more influential or active part in the political process?

That complaint aside, I would recommend *Conspiracies of Conspiracies* as a thoughtful, thought-provoking and relatively balanced analysis of conspiracy theory in the USA, and a comprehensive history of the phenomenon as it has grown and developed over 200 years or so. The language is academic but not oppressively so, and Konda manages to give a clear picture of a subject that is more often obscured under a deluge of intensely partisan opinions. Despite the subtitle, this is as objective as academics get about conspiracy theory.

Noel Rooney

★★★★★

Real Fake News

Techniques of Propaganda and Deception-Based Mind Control – From Ancient Babylon to Internet Algorithms

T J Coles

Red Pill Press 2018
279p, ind, ISBN 9780692196175

Following on from 2016's *Britain's Secret Wars*, T J Coles continues his exploration of the State's investment in a fluid enterprise with very real human consequences. *Real Fake News*

addresses the complicity between political authority and the media it relies upon to perpetuate its control. Beginning with an excursion into the murky world of post-factualism, Cole outlines frequently used strategies such as omission, snowballing, conspiracy and counter-narrative – key tools in thought control.

He looks at the history and exploitation of fake news, and the battle against its global spread. Even the ancient world was at it: Babylonian city builder and all-round superhero Ur-Nammu had the clay tablets to prove his kinship with the God-Man Gilgamesh; and the stelae celebrating Rameses III's military success over the Libyans must be accurate! Cole details the informational obfuscation that followed the famines that struck Ireland and India in the 19th century. He draws the role of education into his survey of indoctrination and the cultivation of a passive population. The questionable claims of ‘Big Pharma’, he asserts, testify to the prevalence of less-than-empirical studies being ratified by peer reviews at the behest of big business... Where will it end? We may never know, given we can no longer rely on visual information in the age of the ‘Digital Necromancer’. He cites Georges Méliès staged photographs of Muslim atrocities in the Græco-Turkish War of 1897 and the CIA's Bin Laden sex tapes.

Part two discusses the misinformation generated by British intelligence, the CIA and psyops consultancies – along with mainstream media – in the (mis-)representation of Iraq, Libya and Syria. Counter-information from Russia, Al-Qaeda and masters of the green screen ISIS further complicates the matter of ‘truth’. With plentiful Internet references as footnotes, Coles guides us through how the BBC (in his opinion) reported on weapons of mass destruction and staged bombings with little or no context and no follow-ups. For many, perhaps, this comes as no surprise; paranoia seems to be the name of the game in our world of slippery ‘factuality’. Discussing the difficulty of weighing the truth content of our daily media fodder, Cole considers how Western





neo-liberalism places shareholders' expectations before the duty of objective reporting. The democratic potential of the Internet, he argues, has been co-opted by the billionaires who control print and televised information, and appear to operate with impunity. Once the mainstream becomes the opposition, Cole asks, will we be able to pin down what is real? He concludes with a vision of our already desperate informational landscape being further blighted by algorithms, clickbait and 'bots'.

For those with an interest in media history and conspiracy in the post-factual age, *Real Fake News* offers grim reading, close analysis and scholarly citation, though it sometimes labours its central ideas.

Chris Hill

★★★★★

The Five

Hallie Rubenhold

Doubleday 2019

Hb, 416pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £16.99, ISBN 9780857524485

The Five does not discuss the crimes of Jack the Ripper or theories about who he might have been, but instead focuses on the lives of five victims: Mary Nichols, Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, Catherine Eddowes, and Mary Kelly. Hallie Rubenhold makes it clear that they were daughters, wives and mothers; were loved; and had families who cared about them. She sympathetically charts their decline into poverty and destitution.

A theme running through the book is that the judgemental, male-dominated society branded all homeless and destitute women prostitutes, and she argues that there is no evidence that Nichols, Chapman, and Eddowes were prostitutes. There is ample evidence that they were prostitutes, all of which Rubenhold omits, such as the reported statement by women in the same lodging house as Nichols who said they knew her to be a prostitute, and a statement in the police files by her husband, who said he stopped providing financial support when he learned she had resorted to prostitution. Rubenhold also subtly edits quotes and otherwise



misrepresents sources. Misusing sources in this way is irresponsible, even in a popular history.

Rubenhold otherwise takes what was already known about the lives of the victims and adds context, which gives greater meaning but generally stops with the last confirmed sighting. Her reasons are understandable, but forces the omission of potential sightings and information that challenges her arguments, especially her daft suggestion that each victim had gone to the place where she was found to sleep.

Readers unfamiliar with the lives of the victims and the harsh realities of life for the poor and destitute in late Victorian Britain will be fascinated and appalled by Rubenhold's narrative, which reads like a novel. Anyone who knows the subject will probably find themselves becoming increasingly annoyed.

Paul Begg

★★★★★

Unexplained

Supernatural Stories for Uncertain Times

Richard MacLean Smith

Scepter 2018

Hb, 342pp, illus, £16.99, ISBN 9781473671126

Unexplained, podcaster Richard MacLean Smith's first work of non-fiction, is a fascinating collection of 10 essays exploring strange phenomena. *Fortean Times* readers may be familiar with his podcast, also entitled *Unexplained* (and reviewed in **FT** 365:68). In the already quite literary audio version, with his austere voice accompanied by at times dread-inducing drone music – listening to it is comparable to sitting around a campfire with a master storyteller – MacLean Smith weaves an engrossing narrative concerning a mysterious, usually paranormal, event.

Unexplained episodes are generally superbly researched, and all conclude with MacLean Smith's placing these strange events within specific social, historical, psychological, or philosophical contexts. He follows the same format in the essays in this volume. What, for example, does the possible reincarnation of a World War II pilot as a young boy in a small English village



tell us about identity? What does an alleged cursed object – in this instance the infamous “Dybbuk Box” – teach us about the nocebo effect, wherein the “psyche... can cause negative effects on the body if it can be sufficiently convinced that it is coming under harm”? What do the events at Rendlesham say about the likelihood of intelligent extraterrestrial life or an alleged instance of demonic possession about free will? The perplexing confusion concerning the identity of the ‘Somerton Man’ about individuality? A collective close encounter with a UFO and its extraterrestrial occupants – the ‘Ariel School Mystery’ – about human perception? The strange demise of Elisa Lam at the Cecil Hotel in Los Angeles about the influence of an environment on human activity? The events at Skywalker Ranch about the nature of reality? Slenderman about the social impact of the Internet? A haunting about the experience of linear time and the potential for immortality suggested by the non-linear time implied by higher dimensions?

Unlike the podcast, the prose format of the essays allows MacLean Smith the opportunity to ruminate at length, unencumbered by the (admittedly self-imposed) time constraints of his podcast, and to provide a more complete investigation of these unexplained events. His

prose voice proves just as compelling as his spoken one; think of these as extended versions of stories that might have appeared on his show. This text-based *Unexplained* is a thoroughly engrossing, page-turning, late night read. Here's hoping MacLean Smith continues to indulge us with his distinctive literary pen.

Eric Hoffman

★★★★★

Mescaline

A Global History of the First Psychedelic

Mike Jay

Yale University Press 2019

Hb, 304pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £18.99, ISBN 9780300231076

One day in 1952, Aldous Huxley saw his trousers properly:



“Those folds in the trousers – what a labyrinth of endlessly significant complexity! And the texture of the grey flannel – how rich, how deeply, mysteriously sumptuous!” Spellbound, his vision transfigured by a Mexican

cactus, he added “This is how one ought to see” (and, you might be tempted to add, “This is how trousers ought to be!”). It is a famous moment, but what is not so famous is that he wasn't actually wearing flannels – he was wearing jeans, but his wife made him alter them for his book *The Doors of Perception*, to raise the tone. And as Mike Jay says, “the image of Huxley on a psychedelic voyage in his grey flannels captured precisely the book's winning sense of intellectual gravitas surprised by joy.”

The rounded-out, behind-the-scenes information and the larger cultural nous of Jay's commentary are characteristic of this excellent book, which has its own joy and gravitas and adds up to a comprehensive history of this enigmatic substance. Sartre tried it in 1935, to less illuminating effect: for a long time afterwards he thought he was being followed by lobsters and crabs, and although he knew they were hallucinations he had to talk to them, asking them to be quiet during his lectures.

You might be wondering, almost with a sense of “absent friends”, what William James was doing while all this was going on. You might expect to find him more involved. The answer is that he did try it, but it made him so sick he never tried it again. Mescaline can be unpleasant, and unpredictable even by psychedelic standards. The exception to all this chaos is the mescaline use of native American peoples, who use the cactus religiously, and this is where Jay's deeper sympathies lie. His great achievement is integrating the two halves of the mescaline story, ‘Western’ and indigenous, rooting it in its native worlds and rescuing it from the kitsch that has gathered around psychedelics since the Sixties.

Herbert Penton

★★★★★

Close encounter revisited

The Falcon Lake flying saucer case remains unexplained, with many inconsistencies and red herrings... and a protagonist with recurring burns

When They Appeared

Falcon Lake 1967: The inside story of a close encounter

Stan Michalak & Chris Rutkowski

August Night Books 2019

Pb, 243pp, illus, £12.99, ISBN 9781786770851

The lack of new close encounter cases (unless you know otherwise) means older, ‘classic’ incidents are getting dusted off and reappraised. In particular, the Pascagoula abduction has had a revival of interest due to Calvin Parker finally detailing his side of the story.

Now we have a new look at the Falcon Lake incident that took place on 20 May 1967. This volume contains Stefan/Stephen Michalak’s original account of his experience which he wrote to save himself having to constantly repeat it to journalists and interested parties. He tells how he was doing some amateur prospecting in Whiteshell forest near Falcon Lake, when he saw a flying saucer land nearby. He thought he could hear human voices coming from it and, being curious, he popped his head through an open side-hatch. Inside he saw a bewildering maze of lights that flashed in a random manner.

The craft seemed to be made of seamless steel and was so hot it burnt his glove when he touched it. When the craft took off, a hot beam of light hit his chest, causing his shirt and vest to ignite in flames. Once the craft left, Michalak felt nauseated, weak and disorientated. He also had a splitting headache and he noticed a grid of burn marks on his chest.

Michalak provides a relatively detailed report of

this harrowing ordeal and its aftermath. He explains his struggles to get back to his hotel and his meeting with a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) constable who seems strangely uninterested in Stefan’s plight. Fortunately, he does get back to his motel and safely home later that day.

Constable GA Solotki filed a report on their meeting in which he notes that Michalak acted as if he was intoxicated and that he had a black substance like wood ash rubbed on his chest. He would not let the constable get any closer because he might have a skin disease or radiation. Michalak did not cooperate with the police and, on failing to find a local doctor, he decided to telephone a local newspaper for help. Eventually he got a bus to take him home, which seems rather strange given his fear that he might contaminate others with a disease or radiation. Perhaps, we can put such odd inconsistent behaviour down to being befuddled by his encounter?

Other elements of the story are equally confusing. For example, he was unable to locate the landing site for the RCMP and the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), even when they gave him an helicopter ride over the locality, yet he found it in the company of a colourful character called Gerald Hart. Hart hated all forms of authority and led Stefan into being suspicious of the RCMP. Into this mix the media was constantly trying to interview Michalak, and Barry Thompson, a member of the Canadian wing of the US Aerial Phenomena Research Organization (APRO), became



a regular visitor who presented himself as working for Michalak’s best interests. Like Hart, Thompson had his own motives for getting involved with the case; both hindered rather than helped the investigation.

The best part of this book are the chapters by Stan Michalak, Stefan’s son, who was nine years old at the time of the incident. He gives a very clear account of how it disrupted their family life and caused him to be bullied at school.

Like most CE3K cases, there are plenty of inconsistencies and red herrings – at one stage there were thoughts of cordoning off the landing site due to the threat from radioactivity, but this was ruled as being insignificant for such an action. A year later small silver fragments are found under the rock at the site, but has this got anything to do with the UFO or something seeded by a hoaxer or hoaxers? Like they say, it’s complicated.

Despite all the probing by the RCMP, RCAF and amateur investigators, no satisfactory explanation has been put forward to explain this encounter. What is certain is that Michalak suffered from ill-health after whatever happened in the forest, and the markings on his chest often reappeared.

Chris Rutkowski, a UFO researcher and long-time friend of the family, summarises the varying pet theories, from outright hoax, alien spacecraft to the testing of a secret military vehicle. He notes this is “a solid report of a landed UFO, complete with physical and physiological effects”. So rather frustratingly, all we can say is that it remains explained as unexplained.

Nigel Watson

★★★★★

King Con

The Bizarre Adventures of the Jazz Age’s Greatest Impostor

Paul Willetts

Crown 2018

Hb, 368pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £18.99, ISBN 9780451495815

Chief White Elk (aka Tom Longboat, Prince Tewanna Ray and Dr White Eagle) was Edgar Laplante, a Native American impostor whose charisma served to relieve his unfortunate marks of their possessions and their common sense. Paul Willetts’s biography, as colourful as its subject, centres on Laplante’s schemes during the early 1920s, when his tales grew taller, more bizarre and ever more lucrative – the bigger the lie, the bigger the payday [see **FT370:46-51**].

His first taste of Native American impersonation began on Coney Island. He later hawked cure-alls in the guise of a native healer in a medicine show, the lie adding credibility to product and salesman alike. Realising he didn’t need the patent medicine, just the bogus persona, Edgar’s routine had taken shape by the late 1910s: roll into town a self-proclaimed chief, lecture and hobnob, receive donations and gifts, and slip away once the hotel bills added up... or the lies didn’t.

Judging from photos of Edgar, it’s amazing he fooled so many. Extreme charm, combined with everyday people’s lack of real experience of Native Americans, was enough to send him touring through the Pacific Northwest and Canada, giving speeches and introducing films. But his hokum reached its pinnacle in Europe, where the highs of a lavish existence afforded by two smitten Austrian contessas served, in the end, to throw the inevitable crash into drastic relief. Like all great and infamous cons, Edgar exists at some intermediate spot between common liar and mythic trickster, making him endlessly compelling, though despicable. Willetts’s well researched tale brings him to our attention once more; and attention, even more than wealth, was what Chief White Elk craved most.

Mike Pursley

★★★★★

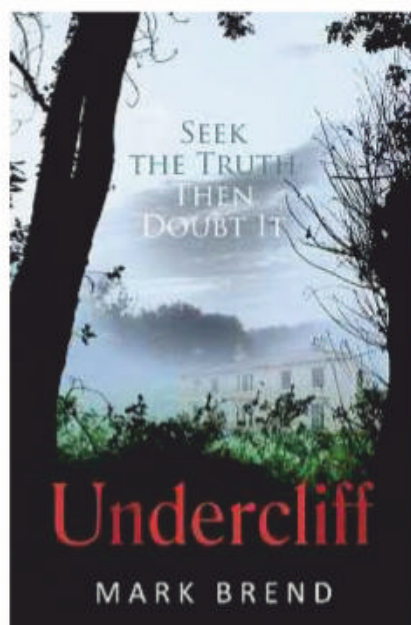
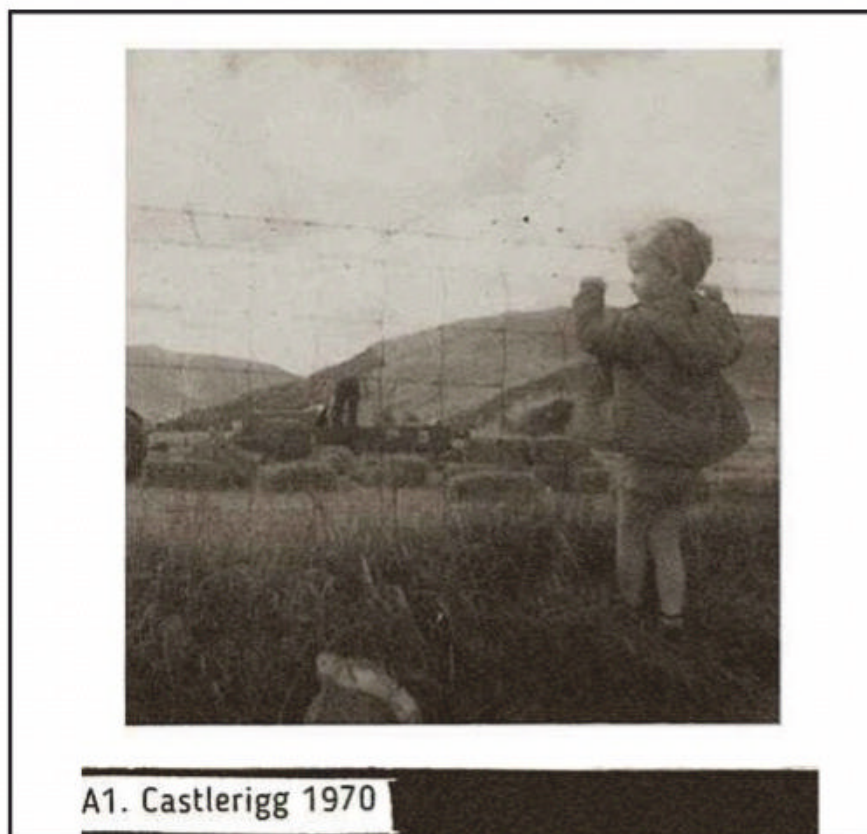
THE HAUNTED GENERATION

BOB FISCHER ROUNDS UP THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE PARALLEL WORLDS OF POPULAR HAUNTOLOGY...

"I think that 'fuzziness' contributes to the nostalgia factor," says musician Jonathan Sharp, founder and guiding light of The Heartwood Institute. "Honestly, it's like looking through a slightly oblique window onto a different world. And really, it was a completely different world in so many ways..."

We're talking about the faded, pale quality of the 1970s family photographs recently discovered by Jonathan amongst his mother's belongings. The photos provide evocative snapshots of a childhood spent primarily amongst the woods, hills and languid seaside towns of his native Cumbria, and have yielded the inspiration for his new solo album, *Divided Time*. It's a wistful evocation of blissfully indolent days spent amongst occasionally mystical landmarks. "The opening track is inspired by a really early photo from 1970 of me looking at Castlerigg Stone Circle, a place I just keep going back to," muses Jonathan. "I actually have no memory of that photo, so I was so surprised to find I'd been there as such a small child. Maybe that's where my obsession with the place started..."

The album is a beautiful collection of elegiac piano and synth-led pieces, with hints of glockenspiel that occasionally conjure up daydreams of long-ago school music lessons. It harks back to an 'analogue' childhood still shaped by family traditions: "Cherry Woods..." ponders Jonathan, referring to the album's mid-point track, and its accompanying picture of his childhood self, framed in silhouette amidst twilit trees. "It's a wood close to where I grew up. It's not on any map under that name, that's just what we called it... and how it had always been known to my parents' generation. But obviously in the world of



Google Maps, it doesn't exist under that name. Which says a lot about how digitalisation has reshaped our lives..."

Divided Time will be available on limited edition vinyl, and via download, from the Castles In Space label. The label's other recent releases have included the Visage Pale album *Holistic Love*, a moving collection of gentle, electro-pop songs, performed in both French and English by Lausanne-based Lars-Martin Isler; and *Civilian Leather* by The Home Current, which evokes memories of Factory Records' earliest dabblings with post-punk electronica.

Visit castlesinspace.bandcamp.com.

Pondering Jonathan's beloved Cherry Woods led me neatly onto enjoying a new collection of music from Stephen Prince's ongoing project *A Year in The Country*, a multi-media exploration of "otherly pastoralism; the flipside of bucolic dreams". *The Watchers* is a compendium of tracks by 11 different artists, all reflecting on the nature of our native trees as, effectively, time travellers. Britain boasts over 3,000 trees that date back at least 400 years, and over 100 that can claim to have been rooted in our soil for 1,000 years or thereabouts. All the while, quietly observing the passage of time – of (as Stephen puts it) "invasions by wooden ships, sword and arrow, the passing of the old ways and the times of witchcraft and magic, the coming of the industrial revolution and the dawning of the digital age."

Individual trees provide very personal inspiration for some of the artists participating. Vic Mars takes Hertfordshire's 900-year-old Eardisley Oak as the muse for his gentle, pastoral

instrumental *The Test of Time*, and *The Winter Dream of Novel's Oak* by Howlround is created from field recordings of an 800-year-old tree in Tilford, Surrey. It's a warm, touching tribute to the receding wild woodlands of the British countryside, and – for maximum listening pleasure – perfect for an early summers' evening constitutional through the copse or thicket of your choice. It's available from ayearinthecountry.co.uk.

And any of the above recordings might provide the ideal soundtrack to reading a new novel by journalist and occasional Ghost Box Records collaborator Mark Brend. *Undercliff* tells the story of divorced writer Martyn Hope, who, in the summer of 1972, finds himself alone in London and drawn into the increasingly sinister cult of The Olive Grove, a religious community steeped in that distinctly 1970s combination of born-again Christianity and post-hippy New Ageism. When his girlfriend Amelia vanishes, he suspects answers are to be found at the cult's ramshackle retreat, Undercliff, a rambling country home on the very edge of Devon's crumbling coastline. It's a languid, leisurely tale, rich in character and period detail, and the darkness creeps in almost imperceptibly. I enjoyed it enormously, and – in my mind – have already cast Robert Powell and Anouska Hempel in the lead roles, with Pentangle providing the music for the Olive Grove's in-house folk-rock group, The Flock. Mark is at minutebook.co.uk.

Visit the new Haunted Generation website at hauntedgeneration.co.uk, send details of new releases, or memories of the original 'haunted' era to hauntedgeneration@gmail.com, or find me on Twitter @ [bob_fischer](https://twitter.com/bob_fischer)

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When Superboy went bad

If you're suffering from superhero fatigue, then this bleak mash-up of the Superman mythos with a grim and gory horror movie might be just what you've been waiting for...



Brightburn

Dir David Yarovesky, US 2019
On UK release

With superheroes currently dominating the world of audio-visual entertainment, we have already seen a wide array of different approaches and subgenres, be they bright and colourful or gritty and violent; but a dark horror film exploring the subject of superheroes is definitely something unusual.

With Superman being one of the most iconic and easily recognisable comic book heroes of all time, you'd be hard-pressed to find anyone who is completely unfamiliar with the Kryptonian's origin story, and thus the groundwork for the setting of *Brightburn* has already been laid through decades of entertainment. This James Gunn-produced film asks what would happen if an alien child crash-landed on Earth and turned out to be not a super-powered hero but something with more sinister

The emphasis is kept firmly on the horror from start to finish

intentions. While having no connection with the DC Comics property, *Brightburn* still relies on recognisable imagery from Kal-El's lore, which the film then turns on its head to create a genuinely eerie narrative in this grim, super-powered horror.

Some viewers may not like the film's decision to avoid telling us anything much about its central character, the young Brandon Breyer, but with the cardinal cinematic sin of exposition dumping still being committed on a regular basis, *Brightburn's* minimal digging into the origins of this alien boy is a definite plus.

In terms of the acting, Elizabeth Banks is her usual, likeable self, and David Denman puts in a solid effort as the loving

yet sceptical dad, who says everything the audience is thinking. The real star of the film, however, is Jackson A Dunn as Brandon. At times channelling Damien Thorn, Dunn's presence generates a real sense of menace without ever becoming hammy. As a result, the young actor is a believable threat in a film that could all too easily have descended into a derivative cheesefest about superheroes gone supervillain.

Instead of the superhero element overpowering the narrative, the emphasis

is firmly kept on the horror from start to finish, and while *Brightburn* hardly reinvents the horror genre, it nonetheless goes against its conventions just enough to remain interesting throughout. The classic superhero moments have an unusually unpleasant type of shock factor when viewed through this bleak lens. Similarly, as a horror movie, the film doesn't shy away from gore, but a combination of relative infrequency and genuine gruesomeness makes it impactful.

While never scaling the narrative heights of the *Guardians of the Galaxy* films, *Brightburn* nonetheless fits in well with the more niche type of films associated with the Gunn clan and their associates. It's also one of the better horror films to be released so far this year, and a nice subversion of the superhero films we have become accustomed to in recent years.

Leyla Mikelssen



Ma

Dir Tate Taylor, US 2019
On UK release

When it comes to contemporary horror, production company Blumhouse seem to have had their fingers in many of the blood-spattered pies on offer in recent years. While the company has served up some delectable fare – like the magnificent *Get Out* – other offerings have been less successful; the laughably moronic *Truth or Dare* left viewers with a bad taste in their mouths, and now with *Ma* we get a distinctly mixed bag of creepy treats.

Octavia Spencer plays oddball veterinary assistant Sue Ann, a middle-aged woman who befriends a group of teens when she helps them buy alcohol at a local liquor store. Teen characters in Blumhouse films tend to be outrageously gullible, and so the youngsters merrily accept Sue Ann's subsequent offer to let them hang out and party in her basement. Naturally, things soon take a disturbing turn, and a devious plot begins to unfold as Sue Ann's ulterior motives slowly come to light.

Discovering what those motives are is one of the film's intriguing pleasures, and it does rather well at sustaining the mystery of what horrors lie in store for the unsuspecting teens, and, perhaps more importantly, why. Octavia Spencer clearly has a lot of fun channelling her inner Annie Wilkes, and the film is well worth a watch on the basis of her performance alone. However, the rest of the movie surrounding her is an odd and not entirely successful one. The dialogue is often awkwardly stilted, and at times one wonders if there is supposed to be a satirical subtext or whether the filmmakers merely ran with the concept

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.peterlaws.co.uk)

Documenting screen horror

Horror fans don't just passively watch a zombie ramming splintered wood into a woman's eyeball. They discuss it afterwards. They ask questions. How did they fake that squishy eyeball? Who was the actress? Where can I buy the funky-ass soundtrack? Yes, we fans don't just swallow horror, we *digest* it. It's no surprise, then, to find that horror film documentaries have become a popular genre. Here's my current pick.

Horror Noire: A History of Black Horror is streaming exclusively on Shudder, and it's a revealing, overdue film full of food for thought. For instance, it examines the giant bug invasion movies of the 1950s and notes that there were hardly any black characters. Why? Because these films were so often set in the world of science, a supposedly whites-only field. Then there's the black stereotypes, from the savage, brainless zombies lusting after white women to the tokenist black friends in Nineties slasher movies, who only existed to nurture and serve the white heroine. To realise this routine 'colour casting' was happening so



It's only in the last decade that we've seen black voices better represented

recently only demonstrates how revolutionary and unusual the more empowering films were; *Night of the Living Dead* and *Ganja and Hess* really were exceptions to the rule. It's only in the last decade that we've seen black voices better represented in the genre. What's really great about *Horror Noire* is that it makes the necessary swipes at the culture, but it doesn't use horror as a cheap platform to score political

points. It's a letter of love and pain to a genre that has always resonated with black audiences. "We've always loved horror," one interviewee says. "But horror hasn't always loved us."

Horror Noire takes a broad view of the genre, but there's a bevy of films that focus on single films or franchises instead. *You're So Cool Brewster: The Story of Fright Night* (2016), *Birth of the Living Dead* (2014), *Leviathan: The Story of Hellraiser* (2015) and *Unearthed and Untold: The Path to Pet Sematary* (2017) are all recommended, and are on Shudder now. For a doc that explores the space in which horror films slip into reality, you really must try *My Amityville Horror* (2013, DVD and Amazon Prime). Here, Daniel Lutz (son of the infamous George and Kathy) breaks his 35-year silence about the murder/haunting that would terrify readers and moviegoers across the globe. A troubled, visibly agitated Daniel pulls few punches when talking about his father, George Lutz, who he paints as a flawed, vain and controlling man. But if the psychological shivers aren't enough, Daniel keeps insisting that the ghosts of Amityville were real.

For a charming and funny account of the atrocious (i.e. amazing) 80s movie *Troll 2*, you must see *Best Worst Movie* (2017). And don't miss *Room 237* (2013), which explores the bafflingly whacky fan theories about Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, or *The American Scream* (2012), which profiles a small community in Massachusetts who turn their homes into elaborate horror houses for the public to enjoy each Hallowe'en.

If you have BBC iPlayer, you should check out *Fear Itself* (2015), a hypnotic exploration of the human condition seen through the lens of horror movie clips, while *Video Nasties: The Definitive Guide 1 & 2* (2010, 2014) is also essential viewing for UK horror fans.

without giving much thought to tone – which is, frankly, all over the place. Given this, it's difficult to really invest in any of the characters aside from Sue Ann herself. Sadly, what the film lacks in tonal integrity it doesn't make up for in atmosphere or gore. The visual horror elements are nothing to write home about, being largely formulaic and lacking in build-up, but there is nonetheless fun to be had, even if the film inevitably amuses more than it scares.

Leyla Mikkelsen



Apollo 11

Dir Todd Douglas Miller, US 2019
On UK release

Released to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the actual event, this documentary is a straight, factual retelling of the lunar mission during which Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the Moon. The film consists entirely of contemporary footage from launch day to the crew's return to Earth. There is no narration, by Morgan Freeman or anyone else, simply the voices of commentators at the time, NASA staff and the astronauts themselves. The only additions are some simple line diagrams to illustrate for science duffers such as myself some important technical concepts.

It's powerful stuff. Shorn of Hollywood stars or grandiose orchestral music, it immerses the viewer in the sounds and visuals of 1969. Of course, this story has been told on many occasions and in many ways, but watching this documentary is like learning about it for the first time, as if you were there at Kennedy Space Center, Mission Control in Houston, or even the capsule itself.

The scale of the project becomes clear through some arresting images: the massive crawler-transporter taking the rocket agonisingly slowly to the launch position; the last-minute attention to a leaking valve; the myriad staff beavering away in cavernous rooms; the enormous crowds that assemble to witness the launch. It's the last of these that is in some ways the most fascinating: the quality of the





footage makes everything look so immediate that you have to remind yourself that you're watching life as it was half a century ago. These people were living in a world before man had walked on the Moon, before they even knew it was possible. Those of us under the age of 50 know that it worked; but the people on screen didn't, and watching the crowd scenes, it's easy to pick up on the sense of hope and excitement.

The lunar footage is more familiar, but seen in the context of the launch and journey it becomes thrilling again, the culmination of an unimaginably complex process rather than an isolated event. Seeing Neil Armstrong and then Buzz Aldrin setting foot on the Moon is a genuinely moving moment. Michael Collins, the least familiar of the three astronauts, gets plenty of screen time too – and his view from Columbia as he orbits the Moon for a day is a spectacular one.

I can't recommend this film highly enough and you should see it in an IMAX format if you possibly can. If you think you've seen it all before, you haven't seen it like this. If nothing else, it demonstrates the power of the moving image to tell a thrilling story without recourse to violence, special effects or conflict of any kind. In that sense, it's a message from history: that there is really no limit to what humans can achieve when they are prepared to work together.

Daniel King



The Man Who Killed Hitler and Then the Bigfoot

Dir Robert D Krzykowski, US 2018
Sparky Pictures, £14.99 (Blu-ray),
£9.99 (DVD)

Let's get one thing clear from the off: this is one of the great movie titles of all time. It's right up there with *I Sailed to Tahiti with an All Girl Crew*, and there can be no greater praise. The odd thing is, though, that despite it being a wholly accurate description of the film's subject matter, it is also misleading. It's entirely reasonable to assume from the title that the film is an ass-kickin', gun-totin' action adventure which gleefully embraces its own comical

absurdity; but, in fact, it's nothing like that. It undeniably has moments of action and adventure, and comedy too, but for the most part it's a rather gentle and wistful story about an old man haunted by his own heroism.

Sam Elliott plays Calvin Barr as an old man and *Poldark*'s Aidan Turner plays the same character as a young soldier. Barr lives alone in his small New England hometown, with only his faithful dog Ralph for company, and spends his evenings drinking. We learn that during WWII the young Barr was chosen for a near suicidal mission to assassinate Hitler which, against all odds, was successful. However, he finds heroism is both a blessing and a curse, and in his old age he is still pestered by the authorities for help. Specifically, they need him to track down and kill Bigfoot, the host of a plague that could ultimately kill every living thing on the planet. Reluctantly, Barr agrees.

It's often the case in genre films – or B pictures, to use an old-fashioned expression – that as long as certain essential elements are included, filmmakers can say and do pretty much whatever they want. Here, director Krzykowski uses an absurd premise to explore abstract concepts like honour, heroism, love and disappointment. That an almost superhuman character can be lonely and without purpose seems ridiculous, when set against his heroics; but that's life. In setting up this contrast between the jokey plot and the weighty themes, Krzykowski is, in his own way, following the path previously trodden by playwrights associated with the Theatre of the Absurd; now, you don't get much of that in a *Transformers* movie.

Sam Elliott, who was probably born with a huge moustache and gravelly voice, is perfect as the older Barr; superficially he's played similar characters before but rarely with this depth. He's been a fine actor for decades and, although he didn't win, it was good to see him recognised with an Oscar nomination earlier this year. Relatively speaking, Turner is a novice, certainly in cinema terms, but he makes a good action hero and romantic lead, so there's no reason why he can't be a big star.

Daniel King



BLU-RAY AND DVD

THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN

Arrow Video, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

Robert Wise is sometimes accused of screwing up the first film version of *Star Trek*, in 1979. Critics dubbed it *Star Trek: The Slow Motion Picture*, and said that Wise spent too much time on the technology rather than the characters. Ironically, it's that very approach that gives *The Andromeda Strain* so much of its brilliance. Wise adapts Micahel Chrichton's book about scientists researching a deadly alien virus in a high-tech, underground research lab, by spending huge chunks of running time lingering over lab tests, or meticulously showcasing decontamination procedures. Even the brilliant soundtrack by Gil Melle sounds like a computer system going haywire. You might think this would lead to audience boredom, but the film grips from beginning to end. **Peter Laws** ★★★★★

CANNIBALS AND CARPET FITTERS

High Fliers Films, £9.99 (DVD)

A carpet-fitting company think they've landed a lucrative job at a big old country house, but it's actually a trap set by the inhabitants – a family of grunting, inbred cannibals. The result is funny, fast-moving and tastelessly entertaining. In an age of cheap cameras and kit, indie horror is thriving, but what impresses about this low budget film is its sense of ambition and scale. You can tell that director James Bushe doesn't just love horror, he's got a passion for movie-making too. Genre fans will enjoy some of the gory effects. There's one kill, early on, that made my jaw drop: an instant rewind. **PL** ★★★★★

REDCON-1

101 Fims, £14.99 (Blu-ray), £9.99 (DVD)

A zombie outbreak following a prison riot leads to London being quarantined, and an unbelievably under-equipped team of soldiers head in to find the man responsible, who might be the only one who can provide a cure. While its zombies are pretty pacey, the film shambles through every tired trope in the genre. There are ridiculous lapses in logic – who has time to put up missing posters in the middle of a zombie outbreak? Why would the soldiers engage in fisticuffs with the infected? If they have drones surveying the area, why are they constantly stumbling into danger? – the film is sunk by its lack of tonal clarity, a ludicrously overwrought score and annoying stylistic tics. Another problem is the film's agonising running time. Nothing here justifies its two-hour length, and as it rolls from set piece to identical set piece, there's even a countdown serving to remind you just how interminable it all is. **Martin Parsons** ★★★★★

THE ZOO GANG

Network, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

A proper oddity from the ITC back catalogue, *The Zoo Gang* was a six-part 1974 TV adaptation of Paul Gallico's book, in which four ageing members of the French Resistance (with animal codenames) reunite 30 years on to catch art thieves, gold smugglers and other ne'er do wells in the glamorous setting of the French Riviera. Lew Grade, as was his wont, threw money at the international cast (John Mills, Lili Palmer, Barry Morse and Brian Keith) and locations, a theme tune by Paul McCartney, and typically high production values that make for a handsome Blu-ray. It's all very silly indeed, but entertainingly of its time, boasting a cavalcade of early Seventies fashions and guest turns from such stalwarts of the British screen as Peter Cushing, Roger Delgado and (in a hilarious, possibly career-worst performance) Ingrid Pitt. **David Sutton** ★★★★★



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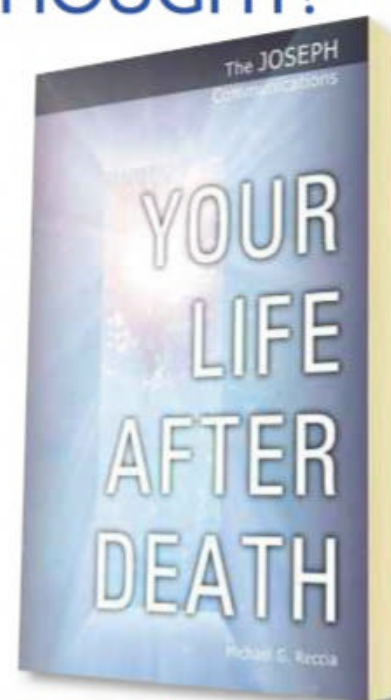
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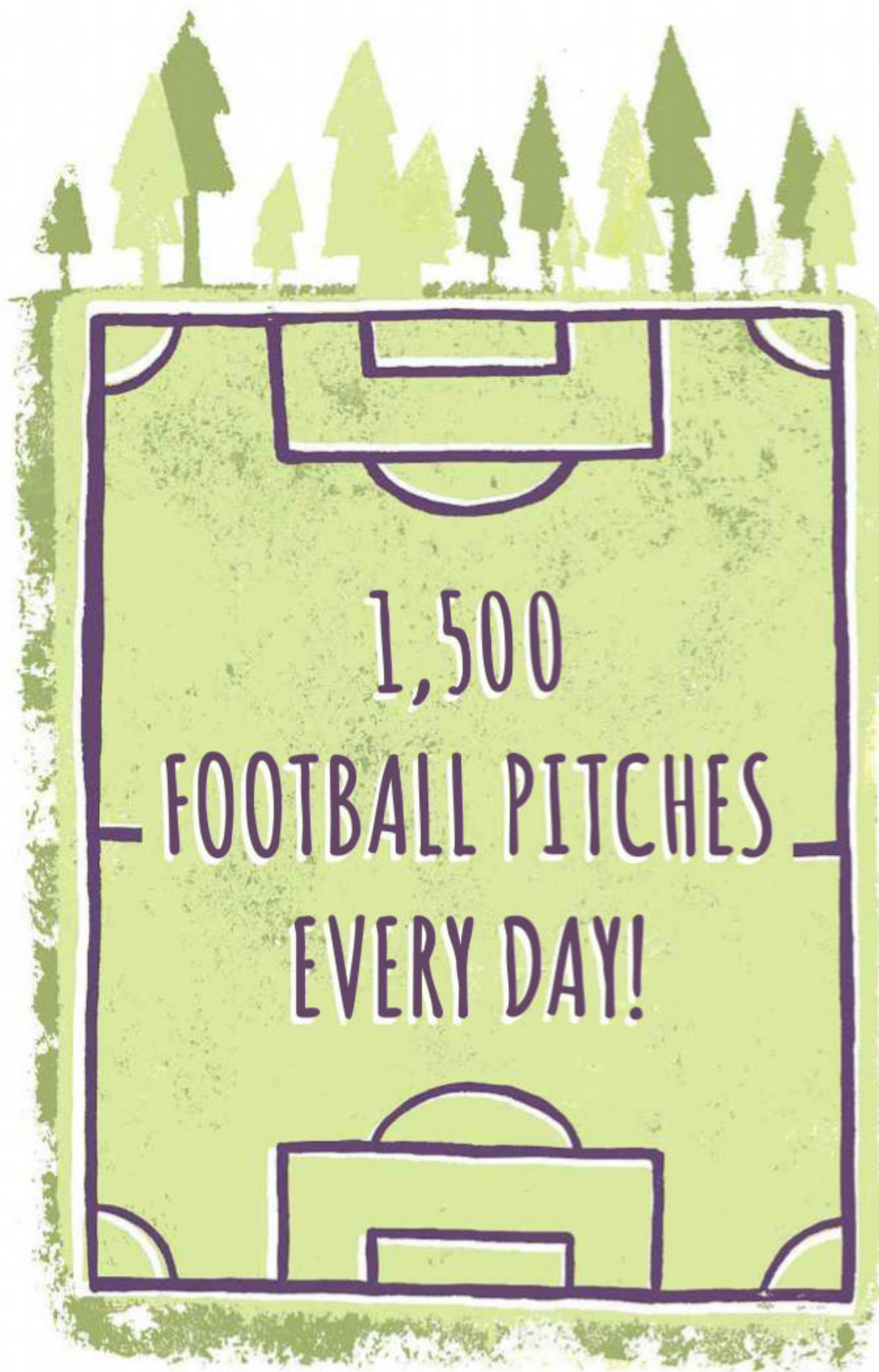
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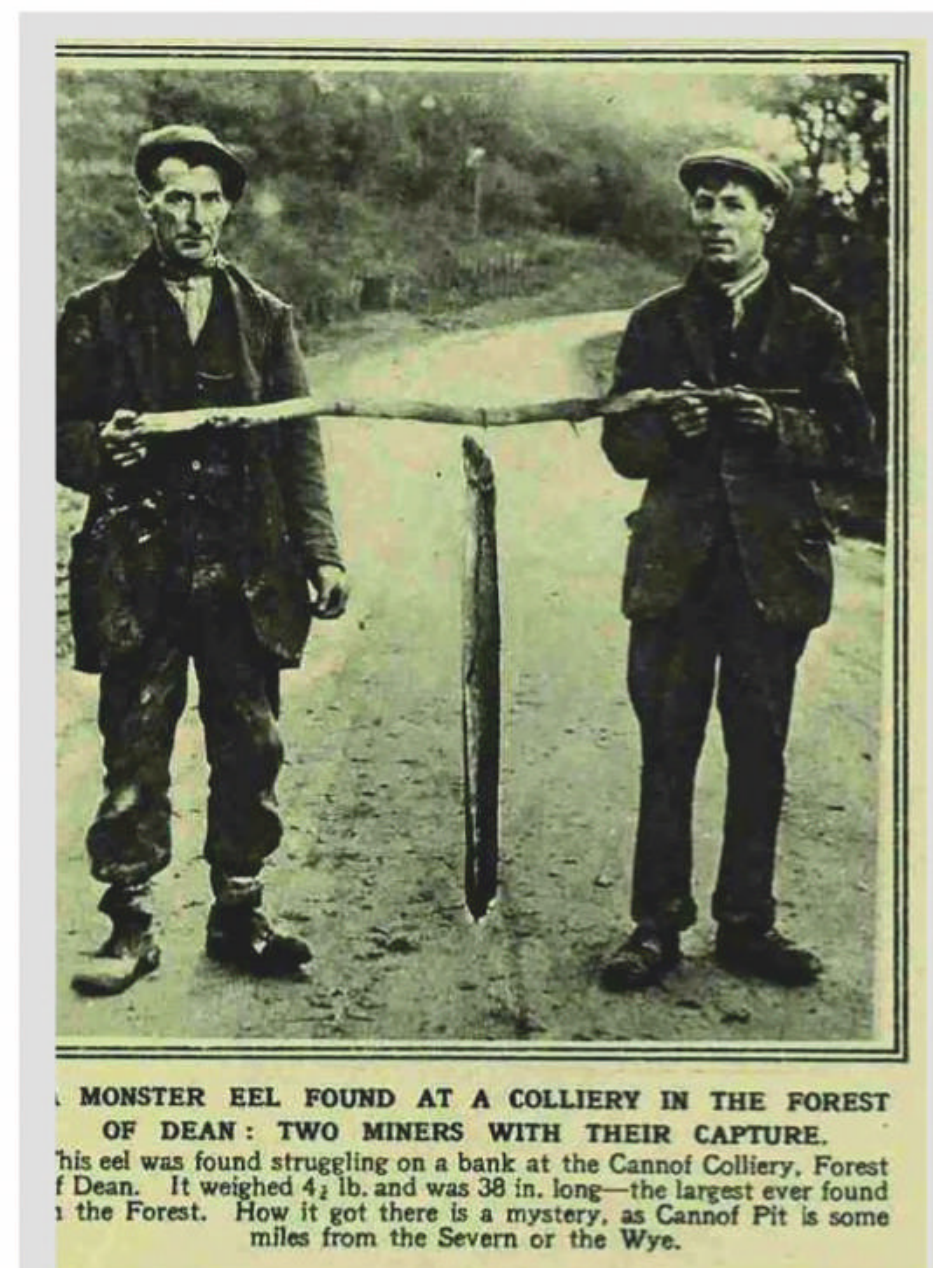
A stud, Dud

Alan Murdie's Latin American "spoof lost in translation" element [FT379:18] put me in mind of our own *Sunday Sport*: how about "Aníbal's Hairy Martian Harem"? Another candidate for debunking is a favourite of mine, the Venezuelan ugly dwarf in Vale and the Lorenzens. In 1967, allegedly, this entity approached in short order a Marine, a woman (who, like Aníbal Quintero, had a headache), and a police officer, and appealed to them to come to its world. All declined, not least because of its alarming appearance. I used to have a theory about this. Was a local man of restricted growth, with something like Proteus syndrome, mistaken for an alien after UFO sightings? Or did familiarity with him influence hallucinations? I don't know the ultimate source, but it could just as well be a comic fictional narrative. It would be even funnier with Dudley Moore as the dwarf. He and Peter Cook brilliantly parodied the whole UFO scene in a sketch from *Not Only... But Also...*: "Superior beings though we be, we are a dying race... This is why we brought you up here, for reproductive purposes. You are to be a stud, Dud..." (*Goodbye Again*, ed. William Cook, 2005, p.293).

Richard George
St Albans, Hertfordshire

Evil reputations

Alan Murdie's suggestion [FT379:20] – that the tendency to create an elaborate folklore of ghosts and anomalous activity around places associated with criminals and evil tyrants may be a sort of coping strategy for



Colliery eel

I came across this picture in the *Illustrated London News* (23 Nov 1929) of a large eel found in a Forest of Dean colliery. I too wonder how it got there.

Richard Muirhead *By email*

communities still 'haunted' by the memory of their crimes – has some merit. I have no doubt also that many paranormal enthusiasts are only too eager to fuel these legends in a way that is insensitive to the locals who still live with the consequences.

However, I recall reading about the experiences of the Tunisian ambassador's family at the former home of Soviet secret police chief Lavrentiy Beria in

Moscow. The wife of the ambassador supposedly witnessed the ghostly figure of a terrified naked teenage girl running along a corridor; and the Embassy staff were all in fear of the nightly cries and shrieks from the basement. The activity apparently began as workmen were excavating the grounds as part of repair-works and culminated with the recovery of several female skeletons that bore evidence of execution, leading credence to tales of Beria's personal depravity.

If this is indeed a true account, then maybe there is more to this than just legend and folklore. As the late Stephen Jay Gould used to say about controversies in science: if in doubt, it never hurts to refer back to the original

document or report. This is especially true in the murky world of paranormal investigations.

Michael Sherlock
Corbally, Limerick

Alan Murdie mentions the Beria house in Moscow, and the fact that a child fell from a sixth storey window [FT379:20]. I wonder if this is an urban legend, as from pictures I have been able to find the house only appears to have three storeys, if you count the "semi-basement" indicated by the lowest row of windows. There is the two-storey section illustrated in *FT*, and – not visible in the picture – a three-storey section behind this.

Dave Miles
By email

Life is a Minestrone

Reading the letter about Ian Fleming [FT377:73] reminded me of a possible link between a line in 10cc's song 'Life is a Minestrone' and the life story of one Frank Abagnale Jnr. I am referring to the line 'Signing cheques to ward off double pneumonia'. Frank spent much of his criminal career writing dud cheques and was eventually captured in France, where he ended up catching pneumonia in a French jail. A coincidence? I think we should be told.

Mike Smith
Bowburn, Co Durham

Too sweeping

I take issue with the sweeping statement that people with Cornelia de Lange Syndrome (CdLS) "rarely live into adulthood" [FT379:24]. With continuing research and better understanding of their health needs, many people with CdLS do indeed live into adulthood, and have rich and fulfilling lives. I am a support worker to a lady with classic CdLS, who will shortly be celebrating her 55th birthday, and I know of many others – both here in the UK and around the world – who are in their 30s, 40s, 50s and even 60s. To find out more, see the CdLS Foundation UK and Ireland's website, www.cdls.org.uk

Delia Smith
Icklingham, Suffolk



CAROL ISAACS



What is cryptozoology?

I was both amused and bemused to read the letter by Sharon A Hill [FT379:74], claiming that, contrary to my statement in Alien Zoo [FT376:22], the discovery of the spotted siren *Siren reticulata* was not cryptozoological. How ridiculous. The animal had long been spoken of by local people who referred to it as the leopard eel (hence it was ethnoknown), whereas its existence remained unrecognised by science until eventually sought for and successfully collected by the scientists who subsequently formally described and named it. This is a perfect example and vindication of the classic cryptozoological method in action. Yet Hill bizarrely claims that “following up on local reports of a mysterious, unfamiliar-sounding beast and obtaining physical specimens, then subjecting them to formal zoological examination, culminating in determining new species... is not cryptozoology, just zoology”. This demonstrates that she doesn’t understand what cryptozoology is.

To begin with: as a sub-discipline of zoology, not a separate discipline in its own right (as Hill appears to think), all of cryptozoology is by definition “just zoology”. However, the specific portion of zoology that the term ‘cryptozoology’ has been applied to ever since it was originally coined, i.e. the aforementioned seeking of ethnoknown but scientifically unknown animals, is exactly what I have described in my spotted siren news report, yet which, paradoxically, is exactly what Hill has denied it to be. Has she not read anything about cryptozoology, including Heuvelmans’s standard definitions of it and its method? If this were not cryptozoological, then the classic, entirely comparable discoveries of the okapi, mountain gorilla, giant forest hog, Congo peacock, and all of this discipline’s other, more recent successes (see my three books on new and rediscovered animals) were not cryptozoological either, because this is exactly



Not so secret society

I spotted this amusing sign on a utility pole in Cape Town, South Africa.

Ryan Snyman *By email*

the procedure via which they too were discovered (remember, it was only the actual term ‘cryptozoology’ that was devised later, not the cryptozoological method itself, which had always existed but had simply not been given a specific name).

As for Hill’s claim that cryptozoology is only concerned with large, mysterious, legendary beasts, this too is nonsensical. In reality: in his classic checklist of apparently unknown animals with which cryptozoology is concerned (*Cryptozoology*, vol. 5, 1986), Heuvelmans included a number of relatively small, nondescript creatures, including some mammals and birds. In any event: bearing in mind that the spotted siren was one of the largest and most visually distinctive new species of animal to have been described in the USA for several decades (thereby making science’s overlooking it for such a long time so unexpected), this should be enough to warrant categorising it as a cryptid when taken together with its earlier-noted ethnoknown status and mode of discovery. Moreover, even David Steen, its co-discoverer and co-author of the formal scientific paper describing it, stated in a *National Geographic* interview (5 Dec 2018) that it was “basically this mythical beast”. Hill ends her piece by claiming that “the definition of cryptozoology remains unresolved”. That

may be true for her, but not for those of us who actively conduct cryptozoological research.

Dr Karl Shuker

Wednesbury, West Midlands

The Masked Walker

Last issue, I noted that two decades ago, quoting the *Guardian* and *Daily Mail* of 29 July 1998, I reported that the 1908 pedestrian Harry Bensley “became a councillor in Wivenhoe, Essex, and died in Brighton in 1970” – and said this contradicted data in Jan Bondeson’s feature on hyper-pedestrians [FT378:44, 380:73]. This was careless wording; the only discrepancy was the death date (Jan correctly gave it as 21 May 1956). I was not impugning Jan’s scholarship; my point, not made explicit, was that newspaper reports are unreliable and should always be cross-checked with other sources if practicable.

Paul Sieveking

London

This and that

- Regarding the feature on changelings [FT373:30-37]: in the film *Changeling* (2008) directed by Clint Eastwood, a young boy goes missing, and the authorities claim to have found him again, but the child they recover is different from the one that disappeared, and the mother (played by Angelina Jolie) refuses to be

duped. Then a dark story unfolds involving serial killers, unwarranted psychiatric detention and John Malkovich saving the day – for a change.

- I was delighted to read the Dark Tourism feature on the Kelvedon Hatch Secret Nuclear Bunker [FT379:30-36]. Back in 2008 I helped out on CND’s 50th anniversary documentary “Beating the Bomb”. My role was transcripts, and research and technical assistance to the producers. I recommended the Protect and Survive Literature and suggested that I visit Kelvedon Hatch to acquire unique visual elements. I met the Kelvedon Bunker cat – a black cat named, appropriately enough, Catastrophe. The documentary premiered at London’s Prince Charles Theatre in 2009 and has gone on to make appearances at various festivals, as well as having a dedicated website since 2010.

- I have been following the saga of The Mystery of the Symbolic Eye Floaters from the start [FT369:76, 379:75], and the latest development delights me. If our intrepid anomalous experimenter is receiving the image of a Peruvian jaguar god projected into his head from afar, then we should pay heed. I propose that he front the project for a Mayan ziggurat, smack in the middle of the Green Belt, with the Chac-Mool proudly atop it, ready to receive the first initiate to have his heart torn out to appease the dragon that eats the Sun. This will make the rainy afternoons just fly by.

- Andy Paciorek’s observations on grieving [FT380:74] made me want to let off steam about the controversy over the new edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, DSM V, which states that anyone grieving for longer than an arbitrarily arrived at length of time is suffering from a mental illness. This is one of the most despicable things I’ve seen our modern society do. I mean, after almost two millennia, we’re still “getting over” losing Jesus, aren’t we?

James Wright

Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex

SIMULACRA CORNER

Faces and figures in nature sent in by *FT* readers



TOP LEFT: Kathy Stewart saw this 'alien face tree' in Kathryn Albertson's Park, Boise, Idaho, in Oct 2018.

TOP RIGHT: Petr Kazil from Rotterdam sent us this woodland owl.

BOTTOM LEFT: This tree root, found in Dodford, Worcestershire, reminded Brenda Davis-Bates of Birmingham of a discus thrower, or maybe someone doing the twist.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Alex Whyles spotted this 'cow's head' on a tree near Old Langho, Blackburn.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.



Lapp shamans

One of the stalls at a Christmas market in downtown Oslo featured Sami (Lapp) handicrafts – shamanic drums among other things. As far as I know, very few original shamanic drums of this type are in existence, since Christian missionaries zealously destroyed all traces of the pagan rites. Presumably, somebody is making a nice bundle by producing modern-day copies. A bit ironic that these drums are offered for sale as Christmas presents – the persecuted Lapps getting their own back, as it were.

A letter from Jeffrey Vallance concerning Lapp shamanic drums [FT245:73] is full of interesting information. However, even when taking paranormal and supernatural phenomena at face value, a certain rational distance should be kept. He writes that “...when it was determined that a Lapp shaman was blowing a ship off its

course, the curse could be annulled by smearing fresh faeces from a virgin into the vessel’s inner seams”. Surely an appealing scenario for seamen with a coprophile bent. But how probable is it that they’d have a suitable virgin handy at the right moment? Old-time sailors generally frowned on having women on board, and I doubt the Sami were any different. And if they *did* have any female crew, would they necessarily be virgins? On the other hand, they couldn’t very well load up with maiden poo before setting out, since it was supposed to be *fresh* at the point of use. This could of course be an example of the ‘impossible’ conditions one sometimes meets in folklore (a Norwegian tale specifies that a certain maiden should be “not naked and not clad, not hungry and not fed”). Or it could be that Jeffrey’s informant was kidding him.

Nils Erik Grande
Oslo, Norway

Helen Duncan’s trials

In a recent ‘It Happened to Me’ [FT379:76-77] there were two spooky stories recorded in Copnor Road in Portsmouth: the old lady with the strange eyelash accoutrements sent in by David Twine and the rain of frogs from Nick Maloret. These rung huge bells with my research for my wartime crime novel, *That Old Black Magic* [FT364:2]. Copnor Road is where the Master

Temple Psychic Centre once was, above the chemist’s shop run by Edward Homer and his wife Elizabeth. This was where Helen Duncan performed her fated séance on 2 December 1941, when she allegedly communicated with a sailor from the *HMS Barham*, which had been torpedoed by German submarine U-331 in the eastern Mediterranean on 25 November, with 868 killed, news of which was placed under a D-Notice.

It is also where a subsequent

investigation into the activities of Helen and the Homers led to them all being arrested at another séance on 14 January 1944. All were subsequently charged with contravening the Vagrancy Act by “pretending to hold communication with the spirits of deceased persons”. This charge was later upped to one of fraud and framed by barristers and the Home Office into indictment, which was found in Section 4 of the 1735 Witchcraft Act: “... the more effectual preventing

and punishing any pretences to such arts and powers”. It led to Helen’s infamous Old Bailey trial in March-April 1944 and subsequent conviction (although the Homers were let off) and incarceration in Holloway Prison for 10 months, a case that remains highly controversial to this day [see FT116:40-43, 372:38, 45].

The subsequent strange goings-on in Copnor Road suggest that the Homers had found a powerful ‘ley line’ to place their business on – even if things did not turn out so well for all concerned.

Cathi Unsworth
London

The Haunted Jarvee

Readers of Jenny Randles’s article on the strange happenings at sea which enveloped the ship *Mohican* in 1904 [FT379:29] might be interested in a short story by William Hope Hodgson, “The Haunted Jarvee”, appearing in the collection of stories about a paranormal investigator, *Carnacki the Ghost-finder*. Similarities with the *Mohican* case consist of an unnaturally calm sea and mysterious small clouds at sea level that approach the ship prior to dramatic and traumatic events. On board the *Mohican* these involved strong magnetic incidents with strange glowings, but the *Jarvee* suffered violent weather, unnatural shaking of the ship, and the death of several sailors. Hodgson had spent some years at sea before making a living as a writer; he may well have heard about the *Mohican* either when he was at sea, or by reading about it later. The story is not typical of the others in the book in that it deals with something more akin to a force of nature than something paranormal, and there is an attempt to explain things scientifically.

Bevis Sale
London

Editor’s note: “The Haunted Jarvee” originally appeared in The Premier Magazine in 1929. It was not in the original edition of Carnacki the Ghost-finder (1913), but was included in the revised edition of 1947.

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts of strange experiences from *FT* readers

I just knew

I woke up on 28 February very much aware that Albert René, the former President of the Seychelles (pictured right), had died. I hadn't heard it on the news or any other media outlet the night before. I always had an interest in the islands and the socialist experiment that René initiated after he launched a coup that toppled the playboy President James Mancham in June 1977. He went on to defeat several CIA-backed coup attempts throughout his long period of office, and became an advocate for a nuclear free Indian Ocean. I went online and looked up *BBC News Africa* and there it was: France-Albert René, President of the Seychelles 1977-2004, had died the night before at the age of 83. I have no idea how this knowledge came to me before I read that news article.

Phil Brand
London

Cretan wildcat

In early June 1987, I hired a scooter to go and view the fabled "birthplace of Zeus" cave in the Dicti Mountains of Crete. On the trip back, becoming lost in total darkness and riding a far from roadworthy machine without lights, I decided to spend the night in the mountains. I had not been long in my sleeping bag before I heard the sound of something obviously large prowling above and behind me. Reaching for my small torch, I swung round to be confronted by a large catlike creature crouched on a rock not six feet (1.8m) from my head. I think it was more startled than I was, as it snarled and spat in the torchlight before disappearing down the back of the rock.

It was about four times the size of a domestic cat, with lynx-like ears and a 'tabby' pattern to the fur. I did not see the back half, so have no idea of tail length. It was somewhat disconcerting to lie there in the dark-



ness listening to it crunching bones and tearing at something it had caught not so far away. No doubt I had chosen a spot in the vicinity of its lair and I was more than relieved to see sunrise.

Brian P Jackson
West Worthing, West Sussex

Editor's note: a Cretan wildcat, long regarded as legendary, was caught in April 1996; see FT98:20.

Something over Corfu

In the summer of 2002, my then-girlfriend and I went on a package holiday to Corfu. Late one afternoon we were walking along the beach when one of us spotted a metallic object in the sky. It was shaped like an upside-down shuttlecock, and was just hanging there. It wasn't moving, and made no noise that we could detect. It was a calm, clear day, with barely a cloud in the sky. Transfixed, we watched the object for 10 minutes or so, trying to work out what it was. Despite a growing sense of unease, I am a sceptic at heart, so I was leaning toward identifying it as a satellite or balloon of some kind. Thinking I might be able to identify the thing at some later date, I pulled out my old Kodak

and snapped off four or five photos. We then continued our walk and went for dinner.

On our return to the UK, I took the film from the camera to be developed, thinking I would be able to solve the metal shuttlecock mystery; but on looking through the photos we found we had captured only a clear blue sky. Whatever we'd seen that day hadn't come out in the photographs. I'm still not sure if this was down to a defective camera (unlikely, as it had no problem capturing anything else) or some kind of cloaking technology employed by whatever the object was (also unlikely). I'm still puzzled by this experience. I can't have imagined it because my then-girlfriend saw it too. But if the thing were actually there, why didn't it appear on the photos?

Chris Saunders
Guangzhou, China

Giant worm

On the afternoon of 12 March 2019 I decided to clear a neglected concreted side passage between front and back gardens. I took apart a plastic compost bin used undisturbed for many years to store bits of wood etc, and started to scrape away the mud beneath, which

contained several worms, slugs and so on. I noticed a very large earthworm disappearing under a nearby shed. The visible part was about 12in (30cm) long and as thick as my index finger – twice as thick as an ordinary full-grown worm. I attempted to grab it, but not tightly so as not to harm it, and it continued to move. I let go to fetch a camera, but when I returned it had disappeared. I have not seen it again. It was the colour of common garden worms and segmented, so it wasn't a slow worm, which I have seen years previously in a former garden.

Back in the 1970s, a nature column in the *Herne Day Press* had a report of a very long worm found in a garden about half a mile from mine. I visited the writer and obtained a photograph, and sent the details to *FT*.

Valerie Martin
Herne Bay, Kent

Hilarious and peculiar

On 22 August 2018, my partner and I were walking from South Harting in West Sussex to Buriton in Hampshire. Around midday we stopped beside the pond near South Harting village to eat lunch. Having been here before, we were expecting to be pestered by the resident mallards – but only one female duck was on the pond. It initially ignored us, but then suddenly emitted a loud quack and paddled furiously towards the shore, a few feet away, and skittered away across the grass as if on an urgent errand, vanishing into nearby woodland. At this point there was another loud quack, whereupon an orderly line of about 10 ducks appeared from out of the trees and rapidly waddled in our direction before surrounding us in usual pester mode. It was both hilarious and peculiar, as this kind of altruistic teamwork surely isn't typical. The daffy blighters deserved a crust or two after that!

Nick Maloret
Milton, Hampshire

Fortean Traveller



115. The Munich 'Monkey Tower'

JAN BONDESON visits Munich's mediæval Alter Hof and discovers an unlikely tale of a young Bavarian prince abducted by a mystery monkey

Regular readers of FT will recall that the old *Illustrated Police News* made something of a speciality of retelling distressing cases of animal kidnappings, in which hapless little children were abducted by dogs, pigs, donkeys or eagles (see FT346-347 in particular). In some alleged accounts of avian abductions, the victims were chosen from among the rich and powerful by the marauding birds: the crest of the Earls of Derby features an eagle stealing a baby away.

When recently visiting Munich, I had a week to see the sights, including the magnificent Residenz, Nymphenburg Palace and Neuschwanstein Castle. In central Munich is the first fortified residence of the reigning Wittelsbach family, now known as the Alter Hof. It was constructed between 1253 and 1255, and part of the building still stands today, housing a small museum about ancient Munich. It was here, in the 1280s, that an agonised cry was heard: "Help! Little Prince



Ludwig was just taken by a monkey! And it's climbing up the high tower with him!"

The identity of Prince Ludwig is not in doubt: he must have been Ludwig (1282-1347), the son of Ludwig II, Duke of Bavaria and Count Palatine of the Rhine. The identity of the monkey is more ambiguous. According to one account, it had escaped from the royal menagerie; according to another, it was a performing monkey belonging to the court jester. After stealing Prince Ludwig away from the royal crib, the animal bounded out through an open window, and climbed up the inner tower of the Alter Hof.

After the royal wet-nurse had made an outcry, the other court functionaries came rushing along. Some of them made efforts to persuade the monkey to climb down, but the frantic animal instead bounded up to the top of the tower, dangling Prince Ludwig about as it went higher and higher. Others spread mattresses and cushions near the tower, so that Ludwig would at least have a soft landing if the monkey dropped him. But in the end, the frantic courtiers managed to induce the animal to climb down the tower, and surrender Prince Ludwig to them.

After this very fortuitous escape, Prince Ludwig the Indestructible would go from strength to strength. He grew up to become a strong, powerful man, a skilful general and a ruthless politician. He inherited the title of Duke of Bavaria in due course, and took vigorous part in the many territorial disputes between the German states. In 1314, he was crowned King of the Romans; in 1327, he became King of Italy as well; the following year, he realised his greatest ambition in life when he was crowned Holy Roman Emperor. He resided at the Alter Hof in



ABOVE: The courtyard of the Alter Hof, a postcard stamped and posted in 1919. **LEFT:** Ludwig is crowned Holy Roman Emperor in Rome in 1328; painting by August von Kreling.



DONALD JUDGE / FLICKR / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE: A child abducted by a monkey in a typical illustration from the *Illustrated Police News*. **BELOW:** The monument to Ludwig in Munich's Frauenkirche.

“Help! Little Prince Ludwig was just taken by a monkey!”

Munich from 1328 onwards, having spent much money to upgrade it. He married twice and had many children, who led successful and productive lives of their own. The Emperor Ludwig the Bavarian, as he was called, died of a stroke during a hunting expedition in 1347.

With time, the Bavarian rulers deserted the Alter Hof, and moved to a new palace, the Residenz. Since 1816, the Alter Hof has housed the Munich fiscal offices. The last king of Bavaria, Ludwig III, was evicted from the Residenz in 1919. During World War II, the US Air Force made determined efforts to flatten both the Alter Hof and the Residenz,

but the old Bavarian rulers had built their palaces sturdy and strong, and both could be repaired after the war. The Affenturm (Monkey Tower) of the Alter Hof remains intact today, although rationalist historians have found evidence that it was in fact constructed as late as 1460, more than a century after the demise of the Emperor Ludwig the Bavarian. The story of late 13th-century monkey-business is thus likely to be a modern invention, perhaps concocted by some students or tourist guides who thought it amusing to attach some notoriety to the narrow tower in the courtyard of the Alter Hof.

FURTHER INFORMATION

www.muenchen.de/int/en/sights/attractions/alter-hof.html

♦ **JAN BONDESON** is a senior lecturer at Cardiff University, and a regular contributor to FT. His latest books are *The Lion Boy* and *Other Medical Curiosities and Phillimore's Edinburgh*.



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WHY FORTEAN?



FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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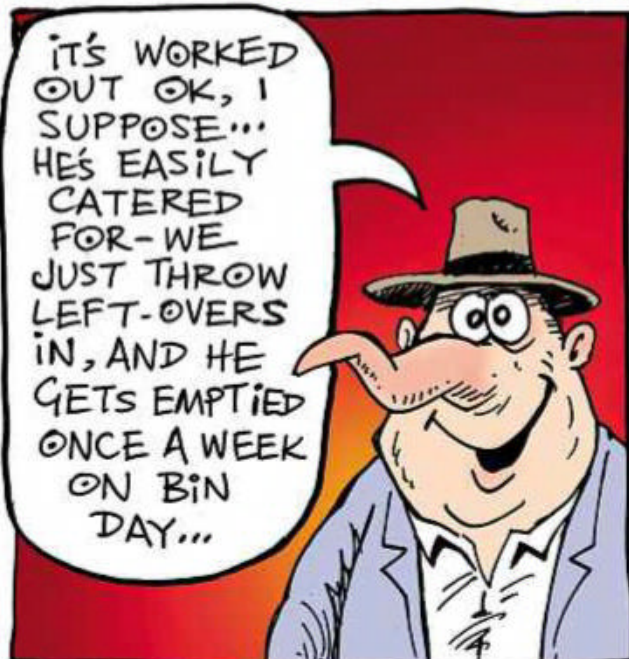
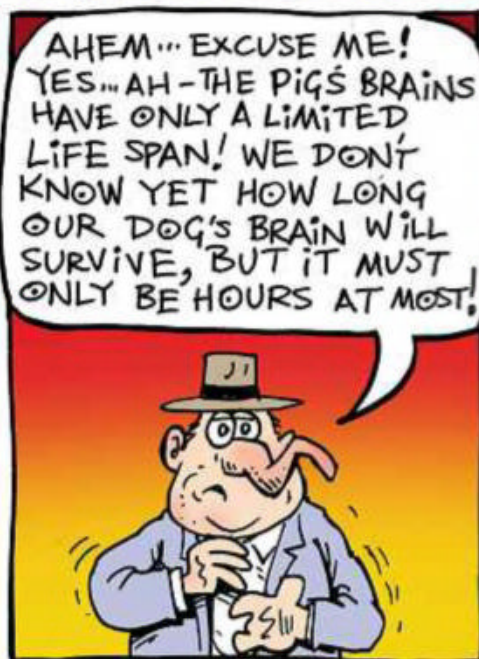
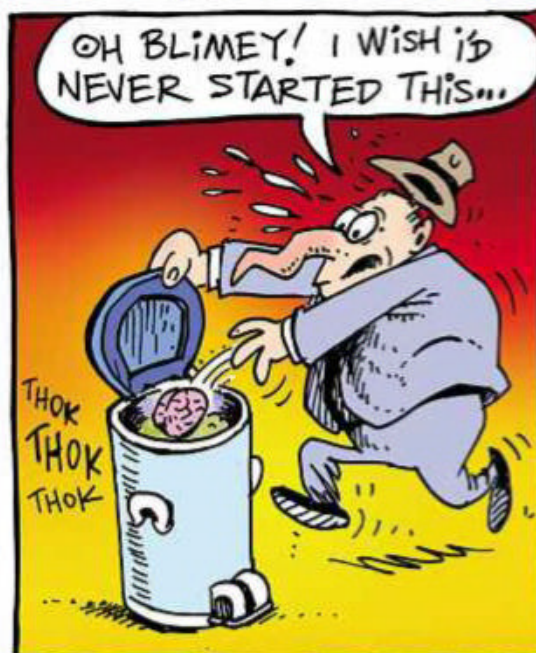
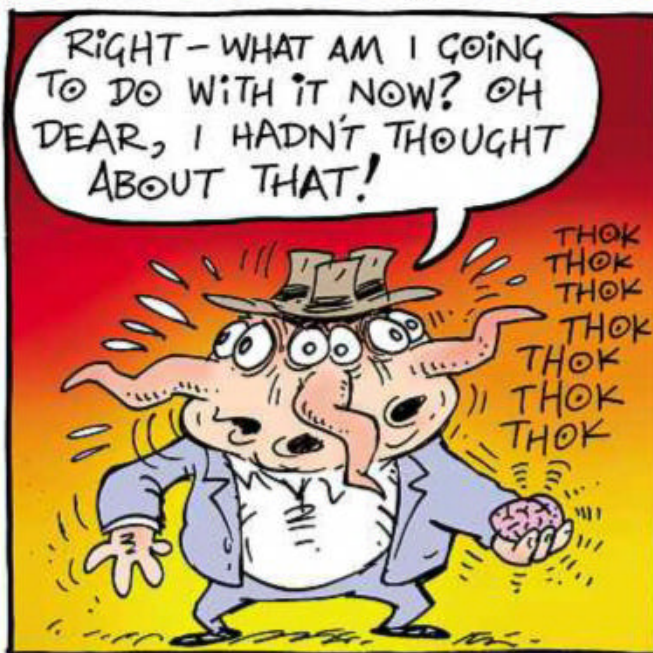
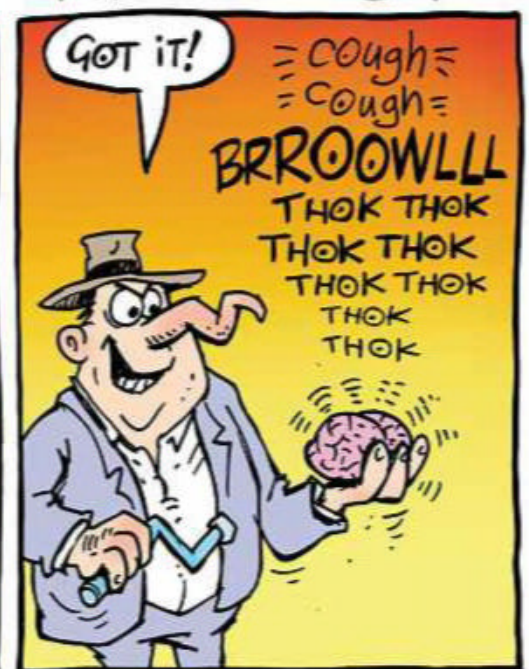
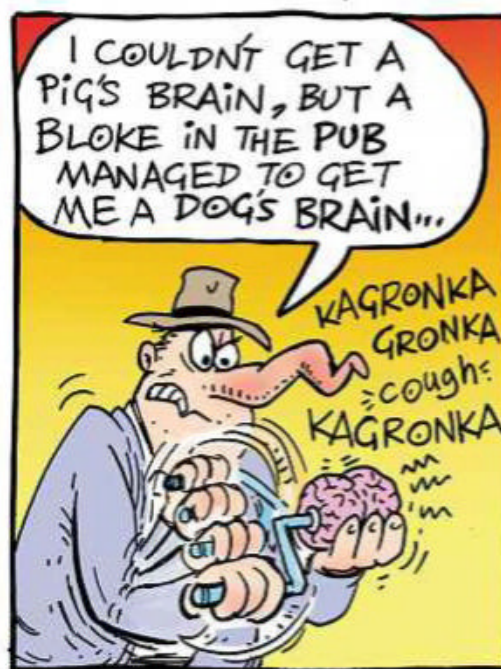
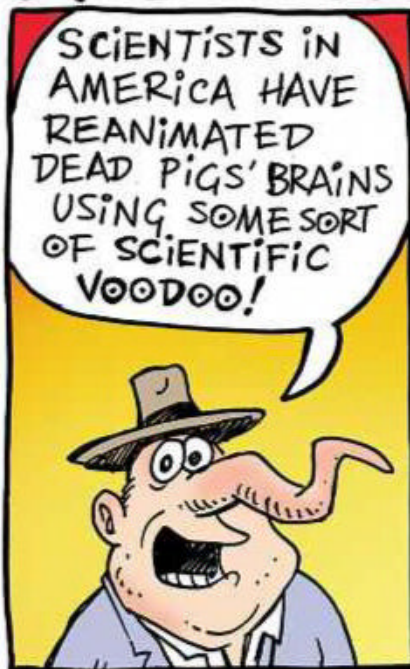
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FORTEAN TIMES 382

ON SALE 18 JULY 2019

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Veteran stand-up comedian Ian Cognito, 60, died on-stage at the Atic bar in Bicester, Oxfordshire, on 11 April. He sat down on a stool while breathing heavily, before falling silent for five minutes. The audience thought it was a joke, and continued to laugh. "Everyone in the crowd, me included, thought he was joking," said compere Andrew Bird. "Even when I walked on-stage and touched his arm I was expecting him to say 'Boo'." He was pronounced dead at the scene. Mr Bird said Cognito had not been feeling well before the gig started, but insisted on going on-stage. He had even joked about his health during his set, telling the audience: "Imagine if I died in front of you lot here." Audience member John Ostojak said: "Only 10 minutes before he sat down he joked about having a stroke. He said, 'Imagine having a stroke and waking up speaking Welsh'." Cognito, whose real name was Paul Barbieri, was born in London in 1958, and was based in Bristol. He had been performing since 1985 and won the *Time Out* Award for stand-up comedy in 1999. Mr Bird said dying on stage would have been the way the notorious hell-raiser would have wanted to go. *BBC News*, 12 April; *D.Telegraph*, 13 April 2019.

After a man died in his sleep in the Thai village of Nong Bung, locals believed an evil spirit was coming for their menfolk. It could only mean one thing: *Phee Mae Mai* (the ghost of the widows) was on the loose. San Yendee, 58, was one of many locals who attached red T-shirts with signs to the trees and front gates of their houses. The shirts had Thai wording that said there were no men in the houses, only women, in the hope that this would save the men from being taken. *thaivisa.com*, 29 Oct 2018.

Chaiwat Nak-iaw and his brother heard cries emanating from a five-storey block of police flats under construction next to the Bang Bon police station in Bangkok, and located the source of the sounds to the second floor. Hat, a 41-year-old furniture repairman from Surin, was stuck in a narrow cement shaft housing water pipes. It was a mystery how he got into such a small space. To free the trapped man, they had to smash the shaft, which took an hour. Sadly, he died shortly afterwards. His younger brother said he had received a call from the police to come and pick up his brother who was drunk and disorderly.

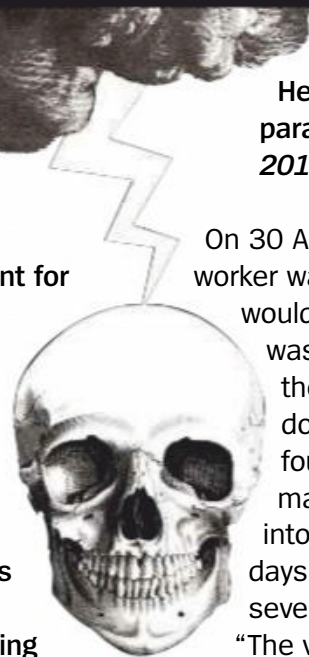
He said his brother suffered from paranoia. *thaivisa.com*, 4 Feb 2019.

On 30 April 2018, a maintenance worker was called to fix a toilet that wouldn't flush in a women's washroom on the fourth floor of the Core Shopping Centre in downtown Calgary in Canada. He found the body of a 20-year-old man inside a wall. He had crawled into a vent behind a toilet three days earlier and got stuck. It took several hours to extract his body. "The victim's motivation is unknown," said a police spokesman. (*Victoria Times Colonist*, 1+3 May 2018).

On 8 January, a Canadian woman was found dead after becoming trapped inside a clothing donation box in Toronto. The bins have teeth to prevent theft, but people can easily get caught on them. In fact, seven Canadians have died in donation bins since 2015, the latest being a 34-year-old man in West Vancouver on 30 December. A 32-year-old man was found dead inside a donation box in Cambridge, Ontario, in November 2018, and a man in his 20s died in Calgary in July 2017. Another victim in 2017 was a 56-year-old Pennsylvania woman dropping off clothes. Her arm became stuck in the bin when a stool she was on gave way under her. Others have found themselves stuck when trying to take clothes, or using the bins as shelter in cold weather. Homeless and anti-poverty activists have called on engineers to redesign the bins so they no longer pose a safety risk. *Toronto Star*, 3 Jan; *BBC News*, 8 Jan 2019.

A 14-year-old kickboxer died due to a rare medical fluke when a blow to his chest caused a cardiac arrest during a championship bout. Scott Marsden from Sheffield collapsed in the final seconds of the fifth round of a fight in Leeds in March 2017. He died from a rare disruption of the heart's rhythm caused by a direct blow at a specific moment in the heartbeat cycle. *D.Telegraph*, 12 Feb 2019.

Six people from the same family were "killed on the spot" by a lightning strike in Madagascar on 26 January while sheltering from a storm. The relatives, including a three-year-old child, were killed in the central village of Bakaro while hiding in a thatched cottage. Another person suffered superficial burns. *D.Telegraph*, 29 Jan 2019.



Glamorous, Globe-trotting Career Started By Studying At Home



Travel writer, photographer and editor, Cindy-Lou Dale, learnt her craft from The Writers Bureau's Home Study Creative Writing course. Fifteen years later she now specialises in writing for the high-end travel, luxury motoring and affluent lifestyles market. Here is her story:

Within 18 months of enrolling on her course Cindy-Lou had been published in more than 80 magazines, newspapers and e-zines around the world, but she hadn't quite achieved her goal. In 2006 Cindy-Lou wrote, "Since childhood I've had a secret dream of writing an article for *National Geographic*. Okay, okay, I know that is really huge but let's be honest here, look what I've accomplished already. The Writers Bureau laid the foundation, my tutor nurtured and guided me and I now have several impressive writing clips to my name and perhaps the confidence to pull it off."

It took another four years of hard work but in 2010 Cindy achieved that childhood dream and had her work published in *National Geographic*. From this exciting acceptance she carried on and her career has gone from strength to strength, "Both

my travel writing, and car reviews, have been published in numerous high-end journals around the world, as well as in-flight magazines, luxury lifestyle publications, wealth management and trade journals...whatever takes my fancy really."

So, apart from getting the right training and working really hard, what else has contributed to Cindy-Lou's success?

"The key is to publish in a diverse mix of magazines," she says. "For example, I'm a travel writer, but this doesn't mean you'll only see my articles in travel magazines. In fact, you'll seldom see them there as they don't pay nearly as well as genre specific magazines like a dental magazine. Remember, dentists too go on holiday – and drive luxury cars!"



It's now 2019 so we asked Cindy-Lou what she thought was important for would-be writers to learn.

"World economics has made freelancing all the more difficult, especially in getting past the first hurdle, which is grabbing the editor's attention. Therefore, formulating a good pitch is crucial, essential even. Being a luxury lifestyle magazine editor myself

I'm often appalled at the shoddy pitches I receive from supposedly professionally trained journalists. I found training with The Writers Bureau to be crucial."

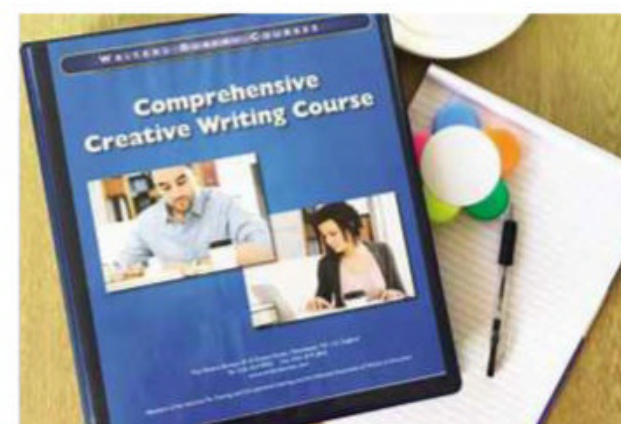
Cindy-Lou has written a self-help book for those who want to break into travel writing. *Secrets of a Professional Travel Writer*, available to buy on Amazon, gets down to the fundamentals of how to compile a pitch and construct an article.



For those wanting to explore creative writing as a full or part-time career option then The Writers Bureau Comprehensive Writing Course is a good place to start. It covers all types of writing from articles to short stories, novels to scripts so people can discover what they're good at and where their passions lie. Plus, you receive constructive feedback from your personal tutor – a professional writer. Information is free and you can enrol on a 15-day trial to make sure the course is for you. Visit their website or call them today. You never know where it will take you – around the world maybe!

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
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